

The Mother's Cry of Holy Russia



Autobiography of Princess Natalia Vladimirovna Urusova (1874–1963)

Concerning Princess Natalia Urusova (†1964), Fr. Seraphim Rose wrote:

"From her childhood she led a highly spiritual life, something rare for someone of high society at her time. After the Second World War, having lost all of her six children (three of her sons were martyred for Christ), she wrote her complete biography, which was never fully published. Her book is a highly moving piece of evidence concerning the price Orthodox Christians had to pay to be in the saving enclosure of the True Orthodox Church.

Due to her spiritual training she was able to discern quite easily the falseness of the Sergianist position, and in her book she offers a first-hand account of how Metropolitan Sergius personally, without pressure from the authorities, suggested which churches should be closed or blown up, and which clergy should be arrested. Hence it is not strange that her book has never been published. It is a mother's lamentation over the death of her catacomb children.

She has provided information on the following New Martyrs: Metropolitan Joseph, Child Sergius and Elder Anatole (of Optina), Priest Vladimir, Abbess Antonina, Priest Alexander - who drew fire from heaven while celebrating the Liturgy on a stump in the midst of a forest, and Archbishop Barlaam.

In the last days of her life she wrote profound poetry which reflected the hopelessness of Orthodox Christians in the free world, simply because it was apparent to her that they were losing the savor of True Christianity - Orthodoxy. Archbishop Averky (of Jordanville), her spiritual father, entrusted her memoirs to the St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood for publication, expressing his hope that this book would see light in the English language for the preparation of our neophytes and converts for martyrdom."

Natalia V. Urusova
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In the bright memory of Archbishop Averky, the spiritual father of the Righteous Sister Natalia Urusova, our Brotherhood was blessed by Elder Herman of Alaska to publish "Memories of Sister Natalia" with the hope that over time it would be possible to decipher the names of the individuals concealed under not always accurate initials from the prying eyes of the NKVD. Unfortunately, this was not possible, and we are printing it as is. The late righteous woman made several attempts to enter a monastery. She led a monastic life. She was not devoid of a poetic gift. Her memories are a remarkable document of the lives of genuine Christians under the severe yoke of godless satanic power. The new generation of Russians has no right not to know and not to appreciate at what cost the Orthodox Faith survived in Russia! This is the strength of her writings. As a brief introduction, we include a few words from the obituary of Archimandrite Konstantin Zaitsev, who partially published her poetry, preserved in its entirety and passed on to us by her longtime friend, Elena Yuryevna Kontsevich, who considered Natalia Vladimirovna a saint.

Princess Natalia Vladimirovna Urusova

UShe quietly passed away at the age of 90 into eternity, the venerable Eldress, Princess Natalia Vladimirovna Urusova, ending her days in one of the suburbs of New York, Sea Cliff, in October 1963. She was surrounded there by the care of attached Russian people and lovingly cared for by Father Mitrofan Znosko. She lost her close ones and accompanied her foreign life in loneliness, finding solace in the proximity to the Church, to which she belonged with all her soul. She experienced much in Russia, where she was transferred from a high position in society to the catacomb Church by the events... A high spirit was evident in her, which did not leave her until her last days and was expressed in the sounds of her songs, kept in her heart and reflecting her entire life. During the past few years, they occasionally appeared in the columns of our periodical publications, but not under her surname, but signed: N. Turenina... The deceased was buried in Sea Cliff after numerous memorial services, conducted by her spiritual father amid a large gathering of worshippers. With his participation, a memorial service was performed by Bishop Averky in the church, and then the deceased was laid to rest, escorted by the prayers of the brethren, led by the Bishop, and those especially close to her who arrived with her coffin. May the Lord rest her soul in the dwellings of the righteous, who experienced so much and managed to pass on to us from her spiritual and prayerful experience.

Archimandrite Konstantin Zaitsev.

1. Before the Revolution

I don't know where to start or how to begin. I do not possess literary talent, but I would like to describe my life from 1917 to 1941. A time of endless sorrows and sufferings, which those living in these years outside of Russia cannot truly comprehend. I had seven children. My eldest son Sergey was 21 at the time of the revolution. Shortly before that, he returned home to Yaroslavl after completing his higher courses in the Page Corps, commissioned as an officer in the Preobrazhensky Regiment. According to people, he wasn't just handsome but tall, slim in his military uniform, he was a handsome man. Gifted musically, he passed the exam after home schooling and was immediately accepted to the 5th year of the Moscow Conservatory, possessing a good voice and naturally talented in painting with oils. It seemed like everything in life promised him the joy of realizing his existence and ample opportunity to apply his talents. The second son, Nikolai, only a year younger, upon graduating with a gold medal from a classical gymnasium, immediately volunteered as a sanitary worker in the flying Red Cross detachment on the front lines. Soon, thanks to his selfless work, tact, and duty performance, he became the head of the detachment. In 1916, he heroically saved all the wounded of the detachment from an approaching gas wave. This wasn't his duty, but the command structure was in disarray, and everyone started saving their own lives; he personally took command and not a single person perished. How he did it and how it was possible, I do not dare to describe, but for this sacred deed, he received a decree and thanks signed by His Majesty and the Order of St. George. Soon, he passed the ensign exam and worked with an anti-aircraft battery. The soldiers all seemed to love him for his fair treatment, but here was the first example of how, under the influence of revolutionary masses, people turned into beasts, completely losing their external and internal image of God.

When the tearing off of epaulets began, followed by the cruel mockery and beating of officers, those very soldiers who served him as younger brothers, grabbed him and with cries of "drown him" dragged him to the Dvina. He did not recognize in these enraged faces, his former soldiers; apart from the horror of the impending, dreadful death, he was struck that his beloved corporal, who seemed like a loyal friend to him, and was also among this crowd, suddenly turned to him saying, "Guys! Drowning this scoundrel is easy, we can do it tomorrow. No, we need to question him thoroughly first, and then deal with him." The crowd stopped. "Give him to me, I'll put him in the cold until tomorrow." Everyone listened and started dispersing, he rudely, as my son described, ordered him to go ahead and led him somewhere. They walked for a long time, he didn't say a word. What my poor Nikolai was going through, anyone can imagine. They approached the railway track where a freight train with empty cars was passing. Suddenly, the corporal's face lit up with a smile, and Kolya recognized his former comrade in him. He led him to the train, which was slowly climbing, and said, "Jump, Your Nobility, save yourself," and grabbing him, helped him jump into a car and depart. How the corporal managed to justify himself afterward was certainly unknown, but I believe that the Lord saved him for rescuing my son, who was able to safely reach his family. I do not undertake to write about all the historical events of that time, as this is not the purpose of my memoirs.

2. Abdication of Nicholas II

We bitterly mourned the abdication of the Sovereign and surprisingly, most people were expecting some new, unheard-of earthly blessings. I remember how in church, a middle-aged priest whom I knew well, always seemed very pious and spiritual, read the act of abdication. The church was full, everyone came dressed up and with animated faces. Starting from the priest, everyone celebrated, rejoiced, and greeted this sentence of Russia, congratulating each other. I, on the other hand, cried bitterly.

A year passed after that. I met this priest again, and he said to me, "You know, when I read the act of the Sovereign's abdication and saw you crying, I was surprised and thought, 'What a strange person, not only does not share in the general joy, but also bursts into tears.' Now I understand you, and how I would cry along with you," to which I replied, "Oh, Father, decapitated people do not cry over their hair. Now you have changed your mind, and only a year has passed; you will see how you will continue to cry.

After the abdication, disgraceful excesses began in the city. Drunken soldiers became the masters of the situation: they rang all the church bells indiscriminately, and in Yaroslavl, there were many churches and many bells. They started showing up in apartments, demanding food and causing mischief.

I had a beautiful painting of an Italian Madonna, bought from an antique dealer. Whether it was a copy or an original, I couldn't determine yet, but the painting was amazing, and I loved this Madonna very much. She was so spiritually uplifting, leading to prayer, but not being an icon, she hung in the living room. One of the rough soldiers stabbed the canvas with his bayonet and, to his and his comrades' delight, pierced the image right in the chest. My husband was chosen from our province as a member of the All-Russian Church Council, and I was alone with the children experiencing this dreadful time. Until the middle of 1918, my two eldest sons were still with me and, of course, were a source of my fear and anguish for them, but despite the seemingly inevitable arrest, they were not arrested and were able to participate in the defense of Russia in the White Army and escape abroad on its retreat.

A little time passed, and searches began to take on a different form. Leaders began to take these drunken and unruly gangs under their control, and searches with looting were brought under the guise of legal decrees, with the CHEKA starting to function throughout Russia. It was impossible to remain calm for a minute. After a sharp, prolonged ring, from which we already understood what it meant and who was calling, several Red Army men arrived, led by the so-called commissar, who, without presenting a written warrant, simply declared, "In the name of the law, I must conduct a search." They then rummaged through everything, overturning sofas and moving wardrobes, looking for weapons and hidden supplies, taking away

everything that tempted their greedy desire to enrich themselves with others' belongings.

3. Miracle of Yaroslavl

In June 1917, all the residents became aware that the next day there would be a massacre of all the intelligentsia. The cynicism of these people, driven mad by malice, reached the point that illiterate posters were hung all over the city:

"Tomorrow at noon, assemble at the former governor's house for the Bartholomew Night to beat all the bourgeois to the last one." The prospect was not particularly pleasant. Everyone who could started to escape by trains, steamboats, and on foot. Surprisingly, the Bolsheviks did not try to prevent this. My husband was at home that day and informed me that since he was the manager of the bank, he had no right to abandon it and had to stay. All the employees fled. My whole life revolved around my seven children, who were dearer to me than anyone else, but I thought that if they killed my husband, it was my duty to be with him.

Early in the morning, at dawn on that day, I accompanied the children to the steamboat to the Nikolo-Babaevsky Monastery 25 versts away. At that time, Countess T., who had fled with all her children from Tsarskoye Selo, was seeking refuge with us. I entrusted all my happiness in life to her and blessed the children, thinking that I would never see them again. Our entire staff also left, except for one footman, Nikolai, who was affectionately attached to me and, despite all my pleas and requests, did not go and stayed, thinking that he could somehow protect me. He had a wife and daughter in another province, but he said that if needed, he would die as a loyal servant. And so, we stayed.

The bank's house was in the courtyard, and our two-story apartment faced the Volga embankment. There was an eerie silence in the city. The day was clear, hot, and cloudless. I looked at the blue sky, so divinely pure, and mentally bid farewell to the sky, the children, and the Volga, down which the steamboat took them in the morning for safety.

As the time approached noon, the heavier and more anxious the feeling in my soul became. The Governor's house was also on the embankment, five minutes away. I placed an icon of St. Nicholas on the windowsill of the living room, received by me under special mystical circumstances (which I will write about later), and which had saved me and the children repeatedly from imminent death or misfortune. I positioned his face facing the direction from which the mob of killers was expected to come, lit a lamp before Him. None of us said a word. What could be said? "Lord, save and have mercy." About ten minutes before noon, an outrageous ringing of all

the bells began, and cries, or rather a kind of howl, of people driven mad by bloodlust, were heard.

We said our goodbyes. The roar drew closer, and a crowd of several hundred people appeared, but what it was, is impossible to describe. Twenty-eight years have passed, and I cannot write about it; my heart beats as if I am reliving it all over again.

Dressed mostly in red shirts with rolled-up sleeves and their hands painted with red paint to resemble blood, armed with guns, axes, and knives, they ran towards our house because all the houses separating us from the Governor's house had been vacated. In the morning, my husband locked the heavy iron gates, but what good could that do!

The sky was still beautiful, blue, and cloudless! In an instant, as the gates gave way to the mass of people rushing towards them, they swung open. A few steps to the entrance, grand door. And then, when the first of the mob touched them with a cry of "break down the doors," something unimaginable, a miraculous act of God occurred; one possible only to the Merciful One. He did not allow these people to harm us. But how! All that happened was also in an instant!

A terrifying thunderclap struck, and such a downpour poured down from the instantly blackened sky that the initially bloodthirsty people, now driven mad by horror, fled in panic, seeking salvation knee-deep in water. Such a downpour had never been imagined; it was not an ordinary earthly rain but a Divine Miracle, I repeat, revealed to us through the prayers and intercession of St. Nicholas.

The people dispersed, the clouds scattered, the bright sun illuminated the world again, and a new scene unfolded before our eyes: the river of water flowed along the embankment, and there was not a sound; everything was once again shrouded in silence, but a gratitude-filled, overwhelmingly indescribable joy enveloped our hearts, thanks to God. Lord! Not only am I alive, but I will see my children again and be with them.

This is the Divine Mercy we sinners experienced and endured. Just think! The crazed people, driven by a thirst for blood, fled in panic from the rain. Yes! Rain, consisting, as always, of heavenly water, but in this water was terrifying for the criminals and all-merciful for us, the Spirit of God. When the water drained away without delay, we went to the pier and left for the monastery on the first departing steamboat. We arrived late in the evening. The monks' reception was touching. The entire monastery was filled with refugees, but when they learned who we were looking for, they were overjoyed because they empathized with the grief of my children, who were crying and in distress. They led us to the upper floor of the hotel, where They cried. We were taken to the upper floor of the hotel, where my dear, exhausted children were already lying on the floor on straw, but they were not sleeping. I will never forget the joyful cries of the children who jumped up and ran to us. Both the older ones and the youngest could not let go and cried, but as for me, there is no need to talk about it. In the morning, we returned to Yaroslavl. The talk of the Bartholomew Night massacre was no longer heard. A peaceful life was out of the question, understandably, for the next twenty-five years; not a minute could pass without fear and anticipation of misfortune, for loved ones and for oneself.

4. Grand Duchess Elizabeth Feodorovna

In June 1918, Countess T. left with her entire family to Kislovodsk. I remember how we discussed with her for a long time where to conceal her diamonds and other valuables that she managed to save during her escape from Tsarskoye Selo. The chances of safely delivering them were slim. Rough thugs were searching all the trains, inspecting everything, even undressing people to find gold and precious items. But she couldn't just abandon them; with great risk and little hope of success, we decided to conceal them in the front of her underskirt. I sewed them for her. For twenty-three years, I knew nothing about her, and what I had to hear was terrible, but it was the usual during that time. She had five children: a daughter of 18 (at the time she lived with me), who soon got married and left with her husband; her eldest daughter, Elizabeth, was a lady-in-waiting to the Empress, and at the beginning of June, she went to Yekaterinburg with the intention of reaching the captive Imperial Family to serve and comfort them in their sorrows. Her mother did not approve of this trip. Being not only faithful to the Sovereign and Empress but also, as far as possible, their friend. She disapproved because she did not think it was possible for the Bolsheviks to allow her daughter to see the Tsar, and due to her daughter's nervous and excitable nature, she feared that instead of calming them, she would agitate Their Majesties. No persuasion helped. So, the countess asked me to go to Moscow to Grand Duchess Elizabeth Feodorovna and ask for her advice on what to do. I went. The Grand Duchess was already living in the Marfo-Mariinsky Convent. She had two modestly furnished rooms but with strict taste, harmonizing with her deaconess attire, semi-monastic. Upon explaining the reason for my visit, this always calm and charming woman became greatly agitated and even somewhat angered...

Upon returning home, I relayed the Grand Duchess's opinion, but Elizabeth T. did not comply with this prohibition and left. Up until last year, I knew nothing about them. In 1945, I received a letter from the countess in Paris while in Germany. After terrible ordeals and advice, thanks to gold from her relatives in England, she managed to leave for London, where she lived for many years, and then moved to Paris. Regarding the fate of her children, she reported the following: she did not know anything about her eldest daughter Elizabeth, who went to Yekaterinburg to be with the Imperial Family; she was not mentioned anywhere in any notes about the murder of the Imperial Family. Recently, someone informed the countess that in 1935, they saw her in Siberia working as a nurse in a hospital. At the time of her departure from me, the countess had three children: a 15-year-old daughter, a 14-year-old daughter, and a seven-year-old son. On the way from me in 1918, her valuables were discovered and, of course, confiscated; she herself was arrested and brought to Kislovodsk straight to prison, and then somewhere deep in the Caucasus, where she spent three years, unaware of her children's whereabouts. Upon her release from prison, she faced the next tragedy in her children's fate. The eldest girl was shot, the second forcibly married to a Jewish man from the GPU, from whom she had a son; and her son disappeared. She searched for him everywhere and finally found him among the homeless in Kislovodsk at the market. This was the fate of one of the representatives of the Russian aristocracy who could not immediately leave abroad. She was a deeply religious woman, a humble prayerful person, loved and respected by all, and that is why she could only endure all her sorrows

5. Miracle of St. Nicholas

During Countess M. N. T.'s stay with me, a frightening incident occurred that could have been very tragic. Everyone was sleeping in the dining room, whose windows faced the embankment. In front of the house was a small garden with a balcony. The balcony stood on four cast iron pillars, and the windows and door from the dining room led to it. My bedroom and the children's rooms were on the other side of the house, with windows facing the courtyard.

Around 4 o'clock in the morning, when it was already light, as it was summer and all the windows were open, I heard voices in the courtyard. I got up, realizing that something was wrong, threw on a coat, and approached the window. In the

courtyard were several military men. There was no Red Army at that time, and these were people, not the rough creatures who soon replaced our army, where you didn't know if you were dealing with a human or a wild beast. One of them addressed me and asked, "Madam, are you all safe?" I answered in confusion, "Yes, thank God, but what's the matter?" "There were six robbers—prisoners on your balcony. We were watching them all day, understanding that they were waiting for nightfall to commit a crime. They approached your house and climbed onto the balcony using the pillars; two had already entered the room when one of us dropped his rifle, scaring them with the noise; they quickly went back down and ran away. We shot one of them in pursuit, wounded and captured another, while four escaped. It's terribly frustrating," the officer said, "we wanted to let them all into the room and capture them alive; they all had large knives." Again, the mercy of God; if one of them hadn't dropped his rifle, they would have killed the entire sleeping family in an instant. I understood why the robbers chose our apartment specifically for the robbery. Shortly before the revolution, I had called in prisoners from the prison who were specialists in carpentry. At that time, this was common practice. The antique furniture made of red wood needed to be re-lacquered, and they did it on-site, without taking it to the prison workshop. There were three of them and a supervisor. In the bedroom was a large iconostasis with a corner cabinet, with large glass windows. Among the icons was an icon of St. Nicholas, approximately a yard in size, in a heavy gilded robe with large diamonds embedded in silver. The icon had been brought by my husband's ancestors from Bar-Likiya. The head of the Saint was painted with exceptional artistry, in life-size, without a mitre. Overall, it was a rare and beautiful image, and I heard one of the prisoners say to another, "Look, that's

where the value is." When the Bolsheviks released all the criminal convicts from prison, it was clear that they intended to obtain this icon through murder. When the military told me that two robbers were in the room, I was terrified and afraid to go to that half where the Countess slept. I rang downstairs, and when the surprised footman came, realizing that something had happened since I was calling him at 4 o'clock in the morning, we went together. The Countess was peacefully asleep, unaware that there were two robbers and murderers in the room with her.

6. Yaroslavl Uprising

At the end of July 1918, my two eldest sons went to Saratov along the Volga to buy flour for the winter; everything became expensive and, most importantly, difficult to find immediately. Famine was expected. I was left with five children: a 17-year-old daughter, a 14-year-old daughter, a 10-year-old son, a 6-year-old daughter, and a 3-and-a-half-year-old son. I had already dismissed most of the servants as it became difficult to maintain them, and then, after a sharp, long ringing at the door, a young commissar entered along with several Red Army soldiers. He addressed me, saying, "Clear out your apartment for us in three days, we need it." I replied, "How can I manage that in three days when so many rooms are furnished?" He declared, "On that matter, we will help you! Comrades, you will take these two mirrors (the mirrors were very tall and beautiful) to my apartment, and this cabinet with antique porcelain as well." I, with surprise, decided to object, "But how can this be? This is my property," to which I received a short, unequivocal response: "Citizen, there is no more private property now!" He continued, addressing the soldiers, "You will take both pianos and the electrical fixtures to the People's House." And with the words, "You must vacate within three days, and if not, we will take care of it ourselves," he left.

What could be done? Complaining was futile, but to whom? Disobedience was impossible, and the next day, from early morning until late evening, I ran in search of an apartment. At that time, when it was impossible to imagine what conditions we would soon face, I did not anticipate needing less than nine rooms. A living room, a study, a bedroom, a dining room, a governess room, a room for adult sons, and two children's rooms besides quarters for servants were necessary. I found nothing

suitable on the first day. The second day was coming to an end with no results when I met an acquaintance who had a large, beautiful house that stood unoccupied as he was planning to renovate it. He took great interest in my difficult situation and offered to immediately hire as many movers as possible and to quickly move all the furniture and belongings to the large hall of his house, which he would renovate for me by autumn, and for me and the children to move to his country house, which was one and a half versts away on the other bank of the Volga, in a vast pine forest, almost by the river itself. I followed his advice. He helped me transport everything, and by the evening of the third day, the apartment was cleared. We spent the night on the floor, with blankets sent down, and early the next morning, we crossed the Volga on a ferry. I still had one horse in the city and a cart, which I used to place the children and only the icons and essentials for a day. I intended to gradually transport what was needed to the country house from the rented home. Except for two brooches and two bracelets, all the silver, a pair of cherished candelabras, and

antique dining room clocks, I took them to the Kazan Women's Monastery, asking the abbess to keep everything safe while I lived at the country house. She agreed, and this was done before the move. It was so beautiful there after the city and its turmoil. The scent of pine, absolute silence only interrupted by the steamboat whistles from the Volga three minutes away from the country house. The children were thrilled, and I decided that day not to go to the city but to rest, both physically and spiritually, in this earthly paradise. Unfortunately, this peace did not last long, only a few hours. Around six in the evening, machine guns rattled in the city. At first, I thought it was some exercise, but no; the continuous gunfire unnerved me, and leaving the little ones with the governess, I went to the ferry to find out what was happening. The distance from the house was one and a half versts; the forest was marshy almost the entire way, and in places, not passable for ten versts. On the way to the city, we had to pass through a small swamp, fifteen fathoms deep, with firm sandy ground. A very beautiful, flat spot among the forest with a small, seemingly clean pond. As we approached the city, we felt an unusual alarm upon seeing people running towards the Volga and from the Volga from the ferry. There was an uprising in the city against the Bolsheviks. I only learned about the organized White uprising in 1943 when I arrived in Berlin, and that's why I am writing what I heard at that time.

7. Estate

Continuing the escape from the country house. After leaving the forest, we all sat on the cart, and as fast as the horses could manage, we quickly drove to the estate of the A. landowners, where we stayed until the shooting ceased. Fear and worry for my sons never left me, day or night. And then, I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw them coming, both whole and unharmed. They didn't know about my relocation to the country house before the uprising, didn't know where this country house was, and the Lord brought them to us. Due to the fire and burning docks, the steamboats couldn't approach the city closely and docked several versts away on the other bank, where we were. When they arrived, they found a friend at the dock who informed them about us. They, too, experienced much, seeing the burning city and hearing that no one was allowed to leave, except for a few brave souls who, under all conditions, know how to save themselves and escape, everyone else stayed. Thousands of people were killed and disfigured; many children were left traumatized. One of the first targets to fall was the city's water supply, and those same young men, dying heroically, brought water in barrels from the Volga. People died from gunfire, in cold cellars and basements from hunger and from the dirty, oil-soaked Volga water. The sound of the cannonade was unforgettable. During a war, there are moments of respite, but here, the rhythm of the terrible bang, bang echoed day and night without ceasing in a terrifying manner. The A. estate was located 15 versts from the city, and it was brightly lit from the glow of the fire. Exiting in the morning at dawn to the balcony or garden, the combination of sounds was incredibly striking; the early birds chirped loudly, as if trying to drown out the earthly, dreadful, deadly sounds. I always remember their chirping; it did not allow the horror to take over completely but stirred thoughts in the heart about another, better world where everything sings and praises God. "We returned to the country house. On the same day, I went to the city. It was all smoky, this wonderful, beautiful city. Where are the golden domes, where are the churches? There are hardly any left. Fortunately, the historical Spassky Monastery suffered little damage. In the Kazan Monastery, the bell tower was destroyed, the churches and residential buildings were pierced, but not completely destroyed."? After receiving a pass from the ferry exit, I went to the Kazan Monastery. The lovely abbess Mother Feodosia and many nuns were arrested and taken away; all the monastery's property and my belongings stored there were taken. The city's horrific scene, of which less than half survived. Coming to Proboinaya Street, instead of the house where my property was, I saw a pile of smoking stones and black chimney pipes. I never regretted for a moment staying with the children without means, as they say, on the street. What saddened me, causing both worry and trouble, was such earthly triviality compared to the Mercy of God, which led me and the children out of the city the day before the uprising; and the cruel commissar, thinking to do me great

harm, by fate, became the instrument of our salvation. The children are all alive and with me!

This was the reason why I was deprived of the opportunity, financially, to leave with the children, like others, abroad. My husband did not provide the means or consent to leave, believing that Bolshevism would soon fall. He didn't have wealth at that time, but arrangements could be made for the move. On this basis and beyond, we did not see eye to eye.

8. Volga

First and foremost, it was necessary to save my sons, as all the youth and even men, were being seized on the streets, searched in basements and attics, placed on the high bank of the Volga with their hands tied behind their backs in rows, and shot from behind into the Volga.

Had they found my sons, they wouldn't have investigated whether they were involved in the uprising or not, but would have subjected them to the same fate. It was inconceivable for me to take any action myself. On the opposite bank of the Volga was a cargo dock and a railway branch. Somehow, they needed to be transported to Moscow, but I was afraid to go to Moscow because, before the uprising in Yaroslavl, there were significant battles against counter-revolution, and anyone coming from there underwent strict interrogation. I chose the Troitse-Sergiyev Monastery, hoping it would be the best place to save them. I arranged with a fisherman to ferry me across the Volga to the cargo dock at night. And so, on a small boat that probably never dared to think it would cross the Volga, which in the autumn is about a verst wide, I set out, taking the helm, with the very old fisherman. It was terrifying; every minute we risked being caught in the path of a large steamboat illuminated by lights, as we couldn't light a lantern; there was an order posted that no one was allowed to ferry across the Volga. The night was dark and windy. Suddenly, the old man said in a frightened tone, "Take the bucket at the bottom and start bailing water quickly." It turned out that, in addition to its small size and age, the boat had sprung a leak. I switched between steering and bailing; I was simply exhausted, but we finally reached the other shore. We docked not far

from the dock. Now, a new excitement and a new fear. What kind of people would I be dealing with? Perhaps they would arrest me without a word and take me away forever! There was no time to think; the children had to be saved. I went ashore and asked where the dock chief was. I was directed to him. I saw a middle-aged sailor who didn't look like a robber or Bolshevik. And so it was. I approached and said that I needed to speak to him in private. He was surprised and invited me into his cabin. I told him everything directly and openly. He thought for a moment and said, "Yes, it's a difficult task to smuggle them unnoticed, but with God's help, we will do it; come with me to the chief of the railway branch, this man is good and will help in whatever way he can." We were joined by a weigher, and the three of us discussed. Finally, we said, "We need to wait at least a week, the times are very unsettled. Visit us, and when we say so, you will ferry your sons, and we will send them off." For a whole week, every night, I endured the fear of the crossing. Once, the Volga was very

turbulent, and I didn't think we would stay upright. Finally, they said, "Let the boatman go now and ferry them one by one." It lasted more than three hours. First, the eldest, Sergey, arrived, and he was locked in the baggage car. When the second son, Nikolai, arrived, they put them in a cage used for transporting dogs and covered it with sacking. They traveled, hunched over, squatting for about six hours to the Lavra. I waited until the train left and crossed to the country house with a relieved heart, deciding to move to the Lavra with all the children myself. I couldn't do it immediately because, having no means, I decided to learn the shoemaking trade, for which I commuted to the city daily.

I forgot to mention that when we moved to the country house on the day of the uprising, we took a cow we had in the city. The housemaid brought her. This housemaid, Grusha, was impossible to persuade to leave us, even Nikolai, the footman I mentioned, had returned home, but this strong, young girl, freckled and unattractive but with a beautiful heart, resisted all persuasion for two whole years.

9. Rose from the Dead

After my sons left, another terrifying incident occurred, but again, by the Grace of God, it ended safely. While in the city, I visited the family of the retired counter-admiral V., sharing in their grief. They had three adult sons, all of whom participated in the uprising. The middle one managed to hide, the eldest was seen being seized by Red Army soldiers and dragged to prison, and the youngest, according to eyewitnesses, was killed. I will not write about the details of their deaths and the despair of the parents. Prayers were held at home for the youngest. Upon returning once from the city, I was alone by the Volga shore in the evening when I heard someone calling my name. I turned around, surrounded by pine trees, and saw no one. I heard my name louder and saw a pale man in a gray jacket behind a tree. I didn't recognize him, but I approached and asked who he was, and he said, "Give me something to drink and a piece of bread. Don't you recognize me? I'm Steve V. I was shot in the chest and making my way through the forest as far as the eye can see." I was stunned. "Steve, you're considered dead. How did you survive?" He told me that when they collected the dead and took them to the Red Cross, his sister saw that he was alive and moved him to the infirmary. Since everyone taken from the infirmary was still executed, they dressed him in a gray jacket and risked their lives to take him out of the city. For a split second, I had a thought of what to do, but it was fleeting. I took his hand and said, "Come with me." He refused and asked only for bread and water. "You know that announcements are posted at every corner that anyone who shelters any man will be shot." "I know, Steve, but I am a mother." I brought him to the country house and laid him down in a little room in the attic. He had been shot in the chest, and the wounds were covered with cross-shaped plasters.

I had the joyful yet difficult task of informing his parents that their son was not only alive but with me. The housemaid Grusha was away for two days, tending to her own affairs and milking the cow; my 16-year-old eldest daughter Irochka was at home alone.

I left in the morning to V. and carefully prepared them for the revelation of God's Grace. I arrived just as everything was prepared for a memorial service, and they were only waiting for the priest. How the parents received the news was evident to everyone. The mother immediately went with me, and the father could hardly stand. We arrived at the country house, only to find out that the children had gone to the forest with the governess, leaving Irochka alone at home. She had just finished milking the cow and was pouring milk into pitchers when several Red Army soldiers entered with rifles and asked, "Is there no one here hiding?" She said to me, "You know, mom, I don't know where my outward calm came from; it was as if it wasn't me speaking: 'No, there's no one here, perhaps you're tired; have some milk, it's just

been milked, good.' I poured them a glass each; they drank; I poured more. They stood up and said, pointing to the spiral staircase, 'Let's go check; maybe someone is hiding there?' And I confidently and calmly said, 'If you have the time, go see for yourselves.' One said, 'Let's go, comrades; she's obviously not lying.' And they left. And then I burst into tears," said my Irochka.

The reunion of the mother and son was not only touching but indescribable. Two days later, horses were hired which awaited him at an agreed-upon location, and equipped with everything he needed, he was sent off, still unhealed and weakened, to a remote station from where he was supposed to take a train to where his parents had directed.

Imagine my surprise when I returned three days later from the city and found my eldest son V. Alexander at home, who had been arrested and imprisoned. It seemed unbelievable that he had not been immediately shot. No prayers were said for him, simply because they believed that God's possibilities were limitless, and indeed, He saved him whole and almost unharmed. He jumped from the second floor at night and fortunately broke nothing, only severely bruising his leg and limping. Once again, I had the task of informing his parents and his young wife, who immediately went with me, and the next day, Alexander and his wife left through the forest on foot, and it is hoped that they managed to escape, as they had enough money to do so.

10. Sergiev Posad

I learned to sew leather shoes very easily. The trial pair turned out well, but my shoulders hurt so much from the tightening that I couldn't continue with this work due to lack of physical strength. After handing over this pair of boots, difficult days began for me as I prepared to move to the Lavra.

During this time, my husband arrived from Moscow. Since the bank building was still intact, he was informed that I was living with the children at the dacha, and that's where he came. He offered to transport the cow to the Lavra because I couldn't do it on the boat, and I was afraid to take it through the city as my departure was essentially a secret escape. I couldn't turn to anyone, as I would have been immediately arrested and questioned by the Cheka about my sons. So, they tied the cow behind the cart, where my husband and Grusha sat, who was supposed to milk and feed her, and we set off on a country road to the first crossing over the Volga. I don't remember exactly, but I know it was many tens of versts. I won't describe how difficult it was to transport the children, the blind old woman, and the governess on the boat one by one; that is self-evident.

Everything was done with caution. The train departed from the branch line through the city; there were many anxieties, and only after passing two stops did everyone breathe more freely, and the children began to talk cheerfully. My husband arrived before us and met us at the station in Sergiev Posad. We couldn't find rooms, so he took us to the covered balcony of an abandoned dacha, where we had to stay for two weeks until a kind man, the poet Alexandrov, a longtime friend of my late father, took us in temporarily. The balcony was dirty and damp; no one had anything warm; everything had burned, but there was nothing else to do. My husband went to Moscow and brought back both sons. I needed to go to Yaroslavl because when moving to the dacha, I had given my sewing machine and some seemingly unnecessary, but necessary under the current conditions, items to a neighbor. I left. I returned the next day and learned about a very frightening circumstance. The Cheka had learned about our relocation to the Lavra and sent a summons, for some reason, to my second son. My husband went to Moscow to his brother's house, where he settled.

So, my son Kolya was summoned to the Cheka, where he was subjected to a rough and unpolished interrogation by people questioning whether they had participated in the uprising and on what grounds I had moved with my family to the Lavra without permission from the authorities in Yaroslavl; they released him with a demand for me to come as soon as I returned. I had to go. The Executive Committee

occupied the building of the old monastery guesthouse. It was terribly difficult to enter this, until recently, peaceful monastery shelter.

One of the best memories of my life flashed through my mind when during my early childhood, around the age of 8-10, my mother, who loved to visit the Lavra, took my sister, a year older than me, and me with her. I recalled the perfectly clean hotel room, the old and venerable monk who was the innkeeper, the novices bringing tea, which was not in a teapot or pot as it is now, but placed on the table, a hissing, shining copper samovar; I remembered the night when everything seemed holy, the monks, the samovar, the little lamps, and even the tulle curtains on the windows. I remembered the mysterious and important anticipation of confession in the half-lit cathedral near St. Sergius' coffin after the all-night vigil, the anticipation in a light sleep of the first stroke of the bell for the early liturgy, the monk knocking on the door to wake us up, and we were already awake, putting on our new dresses with a special sense of reverence. The sky was still starry, the peaceful silence disrupted only by the measured strikes of the miraculous Lavra bell; all of this is indescribable in words. My child's soul was completely absorbed by the awareness of fear and love in anticipation of Holy Communion. Then memories of hot prosphora, toys bought outside the Lavra gates, crosses, icons, belts with prayers; so much happiness and uniqueness. All of this, like a beam of light shining through dark clouds, instantly flashed through my mind; and there I entered.

Dreams of the past illuminated the darkness of the terrible reality that unfolded before my eyes; my legs weakened, I didn't recognize my own voice when I asked where to go. Those who have not seen such scenes may not believe it.

From the first step, the presence of an unclean spirit was overwhelming, yes, an unclean spirit in every sense of the word. The filth that was before my eyes, I will never forget. How much had been experienced in 25 years, if the Lord allows, I will try to describe everything, the terrible conditions of life, hunger, cold, and fear, but at that time, it was all new and seemed so incredible that I thought it was all a dream or that I had lost my mind.

The entire floor was spit on, covered with dirty papers, sunflower husks, and to make matters worse, I had to choose spots to avoid dirtying my shoes. The room they led me to was the same. I was met by several people, if they could be called that. The Cheka commissioner was a healthy, rosy-cheeked sailor in a white, dirty sailor shirt, with an unbuttoned collar and a large red bow on his shoulder. The sleeves of everyone were rolled up, and all were terrifying, like wild beasts; no, even beasts were better. I was most afraid of the sailor, but, to my surprise, some kind of feeling, similar to pity for me, emerged in him. It took a lot of willpower not to show my fear in front of them and to appear calm, but the fate of my not only two elder sons but also the rest of my children depended on the will and hands of these people.

They asked me why I had left Yaroslavl, but how they asked! I replied that I had lost everything during the fires and, having no means of further existence, decided that I

could earn something easier in a small Posad, and then, that I would be close to my husband and relatives living in Moscow. In response, several voices shouted threateningly: "Get out immediately, with all your children and whoever else is with you, back to Yaroslavl." I had to ask for permission to stay given the desperate situation and the impossibility of paying for the return journey and renting a place in the burnt city. In response to my request, there was a lot of swearing, demands, and threats, when suddenly the sailor said: "Stop, comrades, why torment her, maybe she didn't do anything, let her family stay here for now." Turning to me, he said, "If you can provide us with a document from the Yaroslavl authorities that your sons did not participate in the uprising, then maybe I will allow you to settle here in the Posad." The Merciful Lord enlightened me with an idea, and I replied, "In Yaroslavl, no one knows where my sons were at that time. As I explained to you, my son Nikolay, they were in Saratov, where they went for flour and knew nothing about the uprising. They were registered at the volost administration, to which the dacha we lived in was subject, and only the volost elder can provide information about them." I had no idea about any volost administration or whether the dacha was really under its jurisdiction. "Go immediately and bring a document confirming your and your sons' statements." I had to leave the children. Luckily, there was milk, and I wasn't afraid they would starve. I went to Yaroslavl and went straight to the owner of the dacha, who rescued us by giving it back to us. He reassured and encouraged me, saying that the elder and the clerk, on whom everything depended, were his friends and would provide any proof for any amount of money. He hired a guide for me for a large sum of money, as it was very difficult in the destroyed city, put 25 rubles in an envelope with a letter, and I went to the volost, 18 versts from the dacha.

What a trip that was again! The forest, as I wrote, in some places, for dozens of versts, was impassable due to swamps, and since it was late autumn, the road laid along the corduroy road, difficult to pass even in summer, threatened us with imminent death several times. But we arrived safely, reaching the administration. The 25 rubles had their effect, and I immediately received a certificate with the seal of the volost elder. The owner of the guide refused to return the same way and had to make a detour of 70 versts. What was there to do? The volost was on the bank of the Volga, passenger steamers did not run, and perhaps some belated tugboat or cargo steamer would stop. I trusted in God's will and sat on the shore. Two hours later, a steamer appeared, the "Kashin" society's, and stopped not far from the shore. They took me on board after unloading some cargo, and I traveled to Yaroslavl on the steamer and from there to the Lavra by train.

It should be noted that my son Nikolay decided at all costs to go south to join the White Army. It was decided that the next day, he would leave. Oh! How difficult all this was for me, but I agreed to the parting, aware of the sacred duty to the motherland. My elder son, Sergey, was not suited to life's difficulties, but Nikolay was my support and assistant.

The next morning after arriving, I went to the Executive Committee and handed over the certificate I had brought. They took it, read it, and then handed me a paper, asking, "Are you willing to sign this?" The contents were as follows: "I, the undersigned, give this receipt stating that if one of my sons joins the White Army, I will be shot." I signed it, and an hour later, I bid farewell to Nikolay as he boarded the train, which took him away from me forever.

11. Love for the Tsar

After the White Army's failure, where Nikolay managed to get to, he fled with it and settled in France, where he passed away a few years later due to an accident. Soon after, I escorted my eldest son, whose fate I learned about only three years later from a letter I received also from France, where he has been living to this day. I am writing these lines in 1946, and I parted with him in 1918, 28 years ago. Left alone with the children, I had to seek various ways to survive, which was extremely difficult. We lived in the basement, damp and semi-dark. No matter how hard I tried to feed the cow, as the only way to support the children's weakening bodies with milk, it was not possible, and I had to sell her for a pittance. Flour was incredibly expensive at that time, so money went by quickly and unnoticed. My eldest daughter, who was 17, was my assistant and comfort in everything. Always healthy and strong, she caught a cold on a very frosty day when she went to the well for water in just a knitted jumper. There was no coat; everything had burned in Yaroslavl, and there was nothing to buy; she fell ill with severe pneumonia and never fully recovered over the following 10 years, eventually developing tuberculosis. Periodically, she felt better, especially when we moved to Nalchik in the Caucasus, but due to chronic malnutrition, she remained exceedingly thin.

A friend of mine in Moscow gave me a huge, plain carpet from which I sewed warm footwear resembling boots, and I would go to sell them or exchange them for edible products like dried potatoes and roots. I traveled to my former gardener in the Rostov district, to a village located 8 versts from the Debolovo station. This kind old man had served in our estate for many years and left after the revolution when the estate was first looted and then taken away. He was deeply saddened by my situation and helped me a lot, often providing dried vegetables for free or exchanging the warm footwear brought for me by other peasants.

In the first year, I did not travel alone. Grusha did not want to leave me for anything and escorted me everywhere, helping me carry anything heavy and taking tender care of me. Trains, at that time, were only freight and without schedules. If we arrived late at the Debolovo station, we would spend the night at the station master's, a very devout and also a victim of the revolution, an honorable old man. His wife, hospitable as her husband, would not let us go to the village when it was already dark, especially in severe frost, worried that I, although in cotton, only had a short jacket.

Once we arrived when it was starting to get dark and light snow was falling. They tried to persuade me to wait until morning, and I reluctantly agreed (as I always hurried back to the children), but when Grusha insisted on going immediately, saying, "Let's go now; we can still make it, it's only 8 versts; why would we stay overnight; we'll spend the night at Nikolay the gardener's." The desire to return home quickly took over, and we set off. Not long after, a fierce blizzard began. The snow fell thickly, the wind spun so that within minutes nothing was visible. It was getting dark quickly. We lost our way, stumbled in snowdrifts, it became completely dark and scary; we were losing strength, and they began to betray me. I was getting numb and felt that I would soon be unable to fight against the snowstorm. An hour had not passed when I fell into the snow, feeling imminent death. I started to doze off and told Grusha, "You are young and strong; maybe you will find a way out, but I have no strength left; give my blessings to the children," and I could say no more; she begged me tearfully to make an effort and get up, trying to help me stand, but in vain.

And then, something extraordinary and miraculous happened: Right above my head, or so it seemed to me, a church bell struck. It was salvation, not only for me but also for my children, who would have been left completely helpless and orphaned. In such moments, my strength returned to stand up. With a second prolonged strike, we found ourselves near the church. Taking two steps, we encountered a stone fence, and touching it, we reached the gate and saw light in the small window of the guardhouse. Upon our call and knock, the church guard opened the door and rejoiced. We warmed up, drank some hot tea, and spent the night there. He said that in such a terrible blizzard, his soul was never at peace; he always thought, "What if someone got lost and froze in the field; that's why I rang the bell; and that's how the Lord led you to the church's doorstep, and He did not allow you to freeze." Having spent several evenings with the kind station master and his wife, we soon grew fond of each other, sharing experiences late into the night, of the years 1917, 1918, and 1919. Once, when the conversation turned to the murdered royal family, he became deeply agitated. He and his wife were monarchists and loved and were devoted to the Tsar and Tsarina boundlessly. "Do not trust anyone or anything; it's all lies. The Tsar and his family are alive and were taken out of Russia. I am a witness to that." Stunned by this revelation, I was also greatly moved. With a feeling of hope and joy, I asked him to explain the basis of his conviction:

"I was the station master on the Vologda - Arkhangelsk line, closer to Arkhangelsk. My wife and I grieved and lamented that our Tsar, with the Tsarina and children, was exiled to Yekaterinburg, and their fate was in the hands and under the orders of the Bolshevik Cheka. What would happen to them? And then, one day, I was standing on the platform. There were almost no trains at that time, no schedules either. I saw a locomotive coming from the Vologda side, armed soldiers were on it, all looking like guardsmen. The locomotive stopped, one man jumped off, apparently a noble officer, and gave an order: everyone turn around and only turn back in five

minutes, no earlier. We were only four employees. The order was given in such a way that disobeying was impossible, especially since the officer warned: 'Whoever turns will be shot.' As I turned, I managed to notice that behind this locomotive, there was another one with a first-class carriage. On the locomotive and platforms, there were also soldiers with rifles, and on the rear platform, a boy in the age of the Heir in a naval uniform and a sailor. When they passed, I quickly ran home and with indescribable joy, announced to my wife that some soldiers, who knows who they were, Russians or Englishmen, took the Tsar away, and that means he is saved. The officer who gave the command was Russian, but the others could have been foreigners. The next day, I received a newspaper and read about the terrible murder of the Tsar and his family."

This man could not be persuaded that the victims were not stand-ins, and that the Bolsheviks could not admit that the Tsar was kidnapped and taken somewhere through Arkhangelsk. I believed this story and for many years thought that no one else could have been taken away with such precautions and secrecy, but alas; almost 30 years have passed since then, and investigations have proven the authenticity of the murder.

12. St. Seraphim of Sarov

Thus passed the first winter for me and the children in Sergiev Posad. In sweat, I, with the help of my eldest daughter Irochka, procured only the most necessary, meager sustenance. Sometimes there was nothing but oats; they were boiled in the stove, passed through a meat grinder, diluted with water, and made into jelly, which we subsisted on, sometimes without bread, for several days.

In Posad, I met the family of Count Yu. A. Olsufyev, who took heartfelt interest in us, but they too were completely ruined, and though they wanted to help, they could do very little. At that time, the count was in charge of the archives of the Lavra, trying to preserve valuable historical documents from the barbaric hands of the Bolsheviks. Once he brought me a letter to read, saying, "I keep this as the apple of my eye." The letter, yellowed with time and with faded ink, was written by St. Seraphim of Sarov himself to Motovilov. The letter contained predictions about the horrors and calamities that would befall Russia, and I only remember that it spoke of mercy and salvation for Russia. I cannot recall the year because 28 years have passed, and my memory may deceive me, and I regret not reading it with due attention, as I desired immediate salvation and deliverance from the very beginning of the revolution; but it seems it was in 1947, or at least in the late forties of the 20th century. I cannot forgive myself for not copying the letter, but my mind was so preoccupied, and my brain so exhausted, searching for the children's basic needs, that I console myself with this and justify my shortsightedness. The days of Holy Week approached, followed by the celebration of Easter. Utter helplessness. The children were hungry, poorly dressed. Both my older daughters had so many insects in their heads due to the living conditions that it was impossible to fight them without frequent combing; we had no comb, absolutely nothing to buy, and even if there was an opportunity, there was nowhere to get it. Both had long, good hair. What to do! On Maundy Thursday, such a great day, I had to disappoint the children and say, "There is nothing left, my dear ones, but to shave your heads. Both were in tears, and I, with them, but tried, as always, to persuade them to submit to the inevitable when there was no other way. Never before in my life had I parted with the children during church services. They had always been with me, near me, and we prayed together, but that day, an irresistible desire came over me to go to the Chernigov hermitage, located four versts away, in the evening, for the All-Night Vigil with the reading of the 12 Gospels.

Thus, on Maundy Thursday, I embarked on a journey into the forest, alone at night, in the direction of the hermitage, while the children went with their governess to the cathedral to pray. I had always been drawn to this hermitage church. To enter, one had to descend 12 steps underground. The church was small, without daylight, illuminated by a multitude of colorful, expensive lamps and a huge amount of wax candles of all sizes. The Chernigov Icon of the Mother of God was highly revered, not

only in the Moscow region but throughout Russia. In the church, through tiny openings that required bending, one could enter long underground passages. Only twice in my life did I decide to visit such holy, mysterious caves, once the voluntary salvation place of ancient monks. Typically, a monk with a lantern led the way. The cold from the dampness running down the walls in thin streams of water enveloped the body, while an indescribable horror and reverent fear seized the soul when the monk stopped in front of the excavated recesses in the walls and explained that a certain hermit had lived and died there, unburied... That evening, I approached the Chernigov Icon of the Mother of God directly, near the Icon itself. The church was full of people. The touching reading of the 12 Gospels, the stern faces of the monks singing solemnly sad hymns, all merged with my personal experiences and sorrows. No one knew me, and no one knew that I had to disappoint my daughters that day by explaining the necessity of shaving their heads, except the Mother of God to whom I, in tears and a plea for help, revealed my sorrow. The reading ended; the people crossed themselves and left immediately as it was midnight. I approached last. The service was over; the church was dimly lit, with almost all the candles extinguished and only the ever-burning ones remaining. As I was about to cross myself, I felt someone gently grab my shoulder. I turned around... and saw an elderly monk, not from the hermitage, as he was wearing a gray quilted undercassock tied with a belt and a dark blue skufia. He smiled warmly, extending his hand to me, saying, "Do you need these?" In his hand were two frequent combs! I was dumbfounded and asked, not knowing what I was saying, "Where did you get these from?" And he replied, "I was selling them, and two were left; maybe you need them?" I said, "Yes, but I have no money," and he said, "I don't need money." I took one and before I could properly thank him, he quickly left. I followed him, but he was nowhere to be found. I brought home a frequent comb to my astonished daughters; their sadness turned into inexplicable joy.

13. Fates of Monastics

In the Lavra, I met the parents of a novice nun named Katya, from the former Kazan Monastery in Yaroslavl. During that time, the monasteries were plundered, dispersed; the monastic attire was ordered to be removed, and those who resisted or did not comply with these unacceptable orders for true monks and nuns were arrested, taken to Moscow to Lubyanka (O.G.P.U.), and there they either disappeared without a trace or news of them came from distant Siberian camps, sometimes after several years. Katya's father was the chief conductor on the northern railway and had managed to build a small house for himself over the years near the Lavra in Posad. I loved visiting them. They were simple, devout, and hospitable people. It was cozy; four rooms, and in each, like in a cell, many icons in the right corner, and lamps burning day and night. On the walls, there were oleographs from biblical and New Testament times, and in bright colors, portraits of the Sovereign along with the Andrei ribbon and the Sovereign's wife alone or with all the children. For this, they were constantly threatened with execution.

After visiting them two or three times, it was already clear why their only very beautiful, modest, full of all good qualities daughter chose the path of renunciation, monasticism. She was a strict nun in terms of fulfilling vows and a fervent prayer. She did not want to wear secular clothes for a long time and cried a lot about it, and when they convinced her, arguing that for the soul, this was not the main thing, she put on a simple black dress and a white headscarf. I cannot explain, but no matter how you dress a former nun, she is felt under any covering. In 1919, her parents still had the means to live, but in 1920, a famine struck, and Katya had to hire herself out to peasants for summer agricultural work. At that time, there were no collective farms yet. The first summer passed safely, and she returned home in the fall, having earned enough bread for the whole winter. Then, when I parted ways with the Lavra, forced to leave due to the impossibility of existence, I heard nothing about her for about three years. I had to meet her mother, who told me an extraordinary but undoubtedly true story. In the second summer, Katya went to the city of Alexandrov in the spring to find work, just like the previous summer. Alexandrov was a large, famous robber settlement during the reign of Ivan the Terrible - Alexandrovskaya, the gathering and residence of the Oprichnina.

Katya stood modestly in the market square with other workers, waiting for peasants to come and hire them and agree on summer work. A young man approached her and called her to his farm. They quickly reached an agreement. When he left to bring his horse and ride, an old peasant came up to her and said, "God save you; do not go to that farm, there live sorcerers; only 14 households, and it stands on a swamp." Katya did not believe it but thought, "What sorcerers can there be in the world; it's all the fantasies of old people; and what could be scary for her... a nun? A cross and

prayer will protect her from everything." "She left," continued her mother. "The summer passed, not a single letter; the fall was ending; all the workers had long returned home, but Katya was nowhere to be found. My husband and I were worried; we could only console ourselves with prayer, not knowing what to think! They did not even know where she had gone or who she had hired herself to. Once, just before winter, we were sitting by the window, full of sorrow, when we saw Katya, but not her usual humble demeanor, but as if she were not herself.? We rushed to meet her, wanting to hug her and rejoice in her return, but our quiet dove, our praying one, without a greeting, rudely pushed us, her elderly parents, aside and, entering the house, the first thing she did was tear down icons and blaspheme by throwing them on the floor. Then, she started taking things, but not hers, all the best belongings that were ours! We went mad! At first, we couldn't say a word, and then we wanted to convince her: 'Katya, our child, what is wrong with you? Fear God!' She screamed, 'Which God? There is no God!' We decided she had gone mad. She took all the valuables that were there, all the best things that belonged to us, and without saying goodbye, she left. The grief that overcame us was clear; we could only talk about Katya; we couldn't sleep, food wouldn't go down our throats. We both grew thin; the neighbors marveled, and no one could understand anything. That's when I decided to go to the schemanun Zosima, who lived at that time in the Zosimov Desert, not far from the Lavra, three stops by train, near the Khotkov Monastery. When I saw him, I burst into tears and fell at his feet, telling him all my sorrows, and he said: 'She is with sorcerers, and she married a sorcerer she went to. Do not worry with your husband but pray fervently for her. Exactly a year from today, she will come to you with a child in her arms. Accept her; she will be free from the demon that possessed her.' That year seemed long to us. We believed and did not believe, whether it would happen as the schemanun said, and everyone prayed and lit candles for St. Sergius. Exactly a year later, from early morning, we did not leave the window, and it was scary and we wanted to be happy to see her. Midday, we saw a woman with a baby in her arms walking towards our house, so thin that she seemed not human but a shadow. Yet we immediately understood that it was our Katya. We opened the door, and the first thing she did was throw herself with tears at our feet, asking for forgiveness. Before us was our former humble nun, Katya. By God's grace, three days later, the baby died, and Katya devoted herself entirely to prayer." It was hard for monks at that time. Even when we were in Yaroslavl, before the uprising, a footman came and said, "Some ragged monk came to the kitchen asking to see my husband or me. Of course, we told him to bring him upstairs to us. He entered barefoot, with bloodied, scratched to the blood feet; all in tatters, without a hat, already quite an old monk. It happened in April when it was still cold, and the snow had not yet melted in the forests. It turned out that he was the Igumen of one of the monasteries near Rybinsk. He was, as we understood, a demanding Igumen, and the brethren, succumbing to revolutionary propaganda,

decided to kill him, but he managed to break free and run through the forest, dozens of versts. I don't know why he ended up with us. Probably because the house where we lived was prominent and large. We dressed him in everything civilian. How the Lord helped him further, we do not know. He was afraid to stay with us for a long time because the monks from Rybinsk could find him here. It was scary at that time; how quickly not only the peasantry but also the monasticism was demoralized. Of course, not everyone; as in one case, and in the other, there was a small percentage of people sincerely believing in God, who did not succumb to any propaganda, and for this, they died as martyrs in the camps, or simply shot in Moscow, accused under Article 58 of counter-revolution. Some of those who remained alive, in those inhuman conditions in which they were kept, either went crazy or obediently gave their souls to God, enduring all the horrors until the end. Thus perished all the best clergy, starting from the metropolitans and ending with the psalmists; thus perished true monks and believers, the best peasant workers. It must be believed that by the sufferings and blood of these new millions of martyrs, Orthodox Russia will be cleansed and saved. I personally lost 12 relatives in camps and prisons; and about my two younger sons, I have not heard anything for ten years, but I will write about this later.

14. Metropolitan Agafangel

It was shortly before the uprising, in June 1918 when the persecution of the church had already begun. At that time, I had to endure even greater sorrow and disappointment towards the monks. In a monastery 25 versts from Yaroslavl, there was a highly revered icon of the "Oranskaya Mother of God." Every year, it was temporarily transferred to the Spassky Monastery in the city of Yaroslavl, and those willing would receive it in their homes.

It was a spiritually uplifting and miraculous sight. Processions gathered from all surrounding areas, people walked on foot, carrying the icon ahead: a whole forest of colorful banners, shining in the sun, and not just a thousand peasants in festive colorful attire. Everyone sang in a powerful choir.

For a long time, we did not know if this year the Feast of the Icon's Translation and the celebration of the faithful would take place. The Bolsheviks permitted it, but many disturbing rumors were immediately spread, and some more timid individuals decided to abstain and not go as usual with the procession from all Yaroslavl churches to meet the Icon, to join the general procession two versts outside the city. Usually, the Archbishop of the Yaroslavl diocese would meet the general procession at the banner with banners from the Spassky Monastery, which at that time was Bishop Agafangel, the future Moscow Metropolitan. Nervous about whether the procession would happen at all, I approached the banner for the meeting. A dark mass was already visible from afar, slowly moving along the road. The bishop is not there... I thought something might have delayed him, but no... time passed; stars began to appear and move low above the ground, glistening in the sun - the banners. The bishop is not there... The Icon is already visible; but what's this? I couldn't believe my eyes, but with perfect vision, I saw into the distance: a huge red ribbon ran along the entire length of the Icon. It was being carried by monastic monks, and each had a large red ribbon on their left shoulder. There were fewer people, although quite decent, but many times fewer than before. A thought struck me like a hammer: monks... monastic monks... and they were defending themselves with red ribbons, pretending to align with the Antichrist's power. I took the first cab driver I saw and said, "To the Spassky Monastery, to the Bishop, and hurry up as fast as you can." I arrived, rang the bell, and the cellarer opened the door.

"Report to His Grace that I wish to see him." The cellarer knew me well because Bishop Agafangel often came to have tea with us in the evenings, as they say. "His Grace is unwell..." - "I don't care; report to him, and if he is indeed ill, I will still go to his bedroom." He went to report. He returned and said hesitantly, "His Grace asks for you..." I entered; he was sitting, as usual, dressed, on the couch, perfectly healthy. I quickly, in a choked voice, told him about the red ribbons, that we could still send someone on horseback to have them removed, these symbols of blood, as the red

ribbons were called, but he replied: "Yes, you see, this must be excused, after all, it is done out of a sense of self-preservation, and the large ribbon on the Icon is to protect Her from being insulted and pelted with stones." I had read from an archimandrite that evil is always dark, but indignation can be light. I came in fierce indignation and, forgetting that the Bishop was before me, I told him that for me, it was clear that this was not only a great sin on the part of monastic monks who had given God their final vow of renunciation of worldly life, but also a disgrace: "It is not for me to teach you, Your Grace, that God cannot be offended, and the Mother of God cannot be insulted, but those who throw stones at Her will be shamed." With these words, I turned and quickly left home, not going to meet such a procession. That's how great the fear was from the satanic Bolshevik power right from the start: the old monks did not rely on prayer but on red ribbons! Metropolitan Agafangel was soon consecrated as the Metropolitan of Moscow and, being the deputy of the Patriarch, was (but I do not know or do not remember how) destroyed by the Bolsheviks. I only know that he conquered fear, renounced the authorities, and consciously surrendered to the suffering.

15. All-Russian Council of 1919

I wrote that my husband was a member of the Church Council from the Yaroslavl province. I do not intend to delve into the details of the Council's activities—this is a matter for future history. I will only share a few words about my personal impression. As my husband was involved in this, I painfully experienced everything I heard and saw. Unfortunately, fear of the impending catastrophe reigned in the assembly of all the highest powers of the Orthodox Russian clergy (mostly high in ranks and hierarchy but not in the Spirit's power, leading to great sorrow and Russia's demise). Few exceptions... were afraid to openly express their opinions on the issues that needed to be addressed, to warn and open the eyes of the people who still mostly believed in God and loved their earthly king—the people. The Council did not do this. The Patriarch's appeal, written by a theologian, Prince Yevgeny Trubetskoy, if it was printed, was distributed secretly, under the table, once again out of earthly fear. My husband brought me many copies of the appeal that were entrusted to him for distribution. He handed them over to me, saying, "Please try to distribute them, but be careful not to get caught with them." I returned them to him, reminding him of the Savior's words: "When you light a candle, you do not put it under a bed; it should shine openly to everyone." These appeals should be posted on all church doors and street corners, and if I tell the first peasant, giving the appeal in secret, "Look, just don't get caught," then I will immediately take away his faith in the Council and its power. At that time, the eyes of all believers were fixed on the Council in hope of salvation, and I found such a risk groundless and pointless as a weapon to fight against the encroaching force of Satan.

The Council was decided not to talk about politics. All the issues that church speakers talked about for a long time were only related to the future church's formation, the power of their capital, for which two huge estates were to be purchased: one vineyard in Crimea for the church wine monopoly, and the other in the Caucasus with wheat plantations for the church's prosphora needs. From the sale of excess produce, endless riches were expected. My husband was tasked with developing the charter of the future church bank, with a promise to appoint him not only the director of this bank but also the chief manager of both estates. My husband was not wealthy, and these prospects delighted him; he worked day and night on this. I cried, seeing Russia's downfall due to the Council's activities. He persuaded me to go to Moscow for at least one meeting, and reluctantly, I agreed, hoping to find solid ground to stand on and avoid drowning in the quagmire. The first place my husband took me to was a stunning buffet, where you could have anything, while the general public was struggling with food. At that time, there was much talk about an

archimandrite named Alexy, who had spent many years in seclusion in a monastery and had now left. We met him at the door as we were leaving the buffet. I was called by name and received his blessing. A ray of hope shone over me! Perhaps this old hermit, tall, thin ascetic in monastic attire, will speak his holy, powerful word that will crush the devil's power, boldly hoping to seize Russia with its Orthodox faith. Many thought so, but until the end of the Council, he did not utter a word. After its conclusion, he did not return to his monastery and secretly lived in the Troitse-Sergiyeva Lavra at the wife of the murdered minister Khvostov. I do not know his final fate because I left the Lavra. Was it fear—God will be the Judge of all and everything? Everything happened in the Synodal house. My husband and I walked into the huge hall with a stage. On it, covered with cloth, was a table. Many clergy and civilian members of the Council from all regions and provinces of Russia were seated in the front row of the stalls, and my husband was among them. I sat at the back among the numerous audience who had free access.

16. Patriarch Tikhon

A tremor ran through me as Patriarch Tikhon stepped onto the stage and took the center stage, followed by metropolitans, bishops, venerable elders, monks, and Archimandrite Alexy. I wanted to cry out and say, "Save Russia and our Church, almost 200 million people are relying on you." On the lectern, between the audience and the stage, spiritual and civilian speakers started to take turns. The further we went, the more fear and anxiety overwhelmed my soul: not a single word was uttered in defense of Faith, in defense of Orthodoxy, in defense of hope in God to overcome the looming dreadful danger! Numbers were being calculated; talks were focused on creating massive buildings for future church parish schools, buying estates, and so on. Then they announced: now a professor from Belarus (I forgot his last name) will speak. A modest, unassuming man of small stature came out, and this little man spoke few but strong and significant words. I don't remember them literally, although there were few; he was not allowed to speak, and who did not allow him? There was a commotion from the stage, and he was forced to step down from the lectern. Addressing the Patriarch and all the ruling clergy, he said, "These are not the issues we should be addressing right now! Russia is perishing, the throne is defiled. Without God's Anointed, the Orthodox Tsar, it will soon fall under the power of darkness." He stepped down from the lectern for touching on "politics"

when it was decided not to discuss it. I stood up and left the meeting. I can't write anything more about the Council or the Church in general because, due to dire circumstances, I left the Lavra, moved to the Caucasus, and only occasionally learned something from visiting people. I was personally very well acquainted with Patriarch Tikhon; he was a kind, intelligent but not strong-willed Church Leader. He did not feel capable of such a responsible task, as he often said, and if it were up to him, and he did not draw the lot, he would have never willingly taken on this burden, as due to his weak will, he could be the reason for others to bear the burden. This is exactly what happened in the issue of seizing church valuables. He did not decree to refuse the holy items to the Bolsheviks, but by decree, he gave each priest the right to act at their discretion. And so, those for whom the Holy Chalice were dearer than life, were driven by the thousands to torture in Siberia; these people became the first martyrs in the second era of Christian martyrdom in the world. I learned about Patriarch Tikhon's fate and his martyr's end, the mockery and insults directed at him only abroad from published notes and eyewitness accounts. I was fortunate to witness the consecration of the Patriarch in the Assumption Cathedral in the Kremlin. Tickets were needed, and at that time, it was still possible to obtain this right through connections. From the evening, we (about three hundred people) stood near the closed Borovitsky gates. The night was cold. Beyond the Kremlin walls, red flares were constantly being lit, and shots were fired. The scene was gloomy and terrifying; three mounted policemen were amusing themselves by pressing us with their horses' hooves. Voices rang out: "Let Metropolitan Vladimir pass, let Metropolitan pass!" He walked majestically, calmly, in a white klobuk, leaning on a staff. The policemen pushed him with laughter. Anyone who had ever seen this humble, stern ascetic, a monk who earned the respect of all true believers with his holy and wise life, would have gladly fallen to his knees before him at that moment, but it was unthinkable to do so. Soon he was shot. A small gate in the large cast-iron gates was opened for him, but passing through it was not easy, as it was for everyone later when the entrance was opened for us. It was barricaded from below with planks, so it had to be lifted very high to step over. When we were let in, we had to walk under red lighting between two rows of soldiers with rifles, from the gates to the cathedral. What were they afraid of? It is unclear! When I entered the cathedral, I saw Grand Duchess Elizabeth Feodorovna standing at the back. I wanted to approach her, but sensing my movement, she signaled with her finger for me not to do so. I understood that she did not want to be recognized and was not dressed in her community's attire. Kerensky was in the cathedral, and she told me afterwards, "I watched him; he couldn't bear the Divine Liturgy; it simply tormented him." At the consecration, the Patriarch was paler than snow, thinning out within a few hours. I had to meet with him more than once after the consecration. He became calmer, as before, and stood out in conversations with good-natured humor. He was always extremely friendly to me; he had known me for a long time and visited me long before the revolution. He took a keen interest in my difficult financial situation,

helped me with money, gently urging me to accept it. By the way, I will tell you a fact about Kerensky that characterizes this supposedly ideological temporary ruler of Russia, on whom even many intelligent but short-sighted people placed their hopes. Here is an indisputable act against his ideology and honesty. In Nizhny Novgorod, the chief of river police was a certain P. A. Resin, a retired Rear Admiral. He held this position for no less than 15 years. He and his wife were friends of our family, and here is what he told us: "Soon after Kerensky came to power, one dark night, I was informed that an unlit tugboat was traveling down the Volga at speed. I ordered it to be signaled to stop, but it increased its speed. After the third signal, taking several river sailors with me, I went on a motorboat to meet it and illuminated it. It had to stop. I boarded its deck and demanded the captain, asked him for a mandate on the direction and purpose of the steamer. He did not want to give it. I searched him and found a letter from Kerensky to his manager in the name of the Simbirsk province, indicating where he should secretly bury 14 golden dishes taken (stolen) by Kerensky from the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg. The dishes were found in the hold under the coal. I returned them to the palace, but the case was not made public!"

17. Husband

Once again, I return to my life in the Lavra. Things were getting more and more difficult. In the summer, I would go into the woods with the children every day to pick mushrooms. We collected a lot of them, dried, pickled them, and in winter, exchanged them for something edible, but it was just scraps of food. I had to travel, as I mentioned before, to villages and change my jobs. When there was no material left for warm footwear, I decided to part with my blanket. I cut twenty children's caps out of it, sewed them, and hoped to exchange them for something, when unexpectedly the GPU (State Political Directorate) came for a search. The caps were stacked in multiples on the table. "What is this? Secret production?" shouted the searcher at me. I explained that I had to sacrifice the blanket for hungry children. With a short order to "take them," a Red Army soldier from the GPU took and carried away my caps. A day later, I saw them on orphaned children in the city garden. The journey on the roads was a nightmare. People turned into beasts fighting for a place in the unheated freight cars, where up to a hundred people crammed in with bags, baskets, and sacks. Before my eyes, an old man was crushed to death. He was the first one trying to climb into the wagon, and since it was very high, it was difficult for a young man to do it. The crowd behind him pushed, not letting him in and up. He was halfway inside the wagon, lying on his stomach, with his legs hanging out. People started climbing over him with wild swearing and shouting.

I didn't dare to climb in this time, even from the side of the crushed man; it was so terrible, but I was in danger of being crushed more than once. Whether you manage to bring home what you manage to obtain with incredible difficulty (mostly frozen potatoes) or not was a matter of luck. More than once, squads would attack on the road, causing unimaginable horror. Everything was thrown out of the cars, all bags were searched; no one thought of resisting, and if someone dared to, they were immediately seized, thrown out of the wagon, and disappeared forever. The area around the city of Alexandrov, descendants of the oprichniks, the current Communists, were always particularly dangerous, distinguished by exceptional cruelty. As time went on, the health of my eldest daughter deteriorated. Sharing a room in the basement, almost no food - all this created a hopeless situation. I no longer went to the gardener Nikolay, as all the dried vegetable production in the village, where it was, was being taken away by peasants from the wealthy villages of the Rostov district, who were themselves starving. If I managed to get some material help from kind people, I sewed night shoes with rope soles, then took them to a consignment store in Moscow, where they were sold for next to nothing. Before Christmas in 1920, I gave three pairs there. Usually in the evenings, all five children would huddle around me, and I would tell them stories to distract them from hunger. This time we all came up with how we would celebrate Christmas if my

footwear sold. At their request, it was decided that I would buy each of them a loaf of rye bread on the black market. The mere thought of this possibility made their eyes sparkle. I went to Moscow on the 23rd. I had to stand, or rather, hang on the steps of the wagon, almost to the point of suffocation, as the passenger car was close to the locomotive, and passengers were showered with sparks; it had to be extinguished by each other, risking catching fire every minute. My heart was pounding heavily when I opened the shop door. When I was told that not a single pair was sold, I felt sick. The need was so desperate that I had to agree to let my 14-year-old Tanya and 10-year-old Petya try selling pancakes in Moscow. I don't remember how I obtained or if someone gifted a little flour; I only baked pancakes. It was bitter for me, as it was an impossible luxury for my children at that time; each of them would have gladly eaten all of them, and I could only tease them by giving one each.

They took this trip cheerfully and fearlessly, full of hope to earn food. The terrible train journey, about which I wrote, and the thought that my children were standing somewhere on the street, offering pancakes, tormented me, and I decided not to try to feed them with this anymore. They returned late in the evening, and I tortured myself with self-condemnation, imagining various horrors. Amid the rampant debauchery of the city's common people, a pretty girl could be subjected to all sorts of impudence. They returned hungry and exhausted. They sold on the boulevard. One would think that hearts should have been softened at the sight of these two children, but the crowd passed by indifferently, or even mocking. Orphans or juvenile delinquents, who immediately became the rulers of the streets and markets, tried to simply snatch a basket or steal a pancake; the police rudely threatened to take them (the children) away if they didn't leave. They sold at a loss, waited for the train, and returned home. They ate oatmeal jelly and started laughing as they recounted all the events of that sorrowful day. My husband left Moscow, but I didn't know where. We were not divorced, but we did not live together. Sometimes he would come to visit me with the children. We did not agree on many things, which is why I could not emigrate abroad with all the other emigrants. I had no personal funds, and my movable property and valuables, as I previously wrote, were lost during the uprising in Yaroslavl. Being in a completely hopeless situation, I decided to find him so he could take care of helping the children. I found out that he got a good position on the railway in the Don region, Rostov district. I was given his address. I didn't know what to do and felt lost, which was not characteristic of my character at the time. I needed advice from someone I could trust. In Moscow, I met with my brother, who was the last one to act as the prosecutor of the Holy Synod during the reign of the Sovereign. He was the deputy when A. D. Samarin was removed from his position due to disagreement with Rasputin. He was dismissed as well and then taken as a direct assistant by Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich, who was the governor of the Caucasus at the time. My brother was completely ruined at

the beginning of the revolution. When the Grand Duke and my brother were arrested, the Grand Duke managed to escape, but my brother did not. After spending two years in prison, he was released but not allowed to live in the capitals. He barely managed to make ends meet with his wife and two children at a dacha near Moscow, where he would sometimes visit illegally to see relatives. He advised me to go to Father Alexey Mechev, considered a clairvoyant. He was one of the three elders mentioned in the book by Father John of Kronstadt.

18. Fr. Alexey Mechov

I gladly seized upon this thought and went to Moscow, hoping to see him and talk, so that I could return to my children the same day. I arrived at his apartment on Maroseyka, where I was directed to where he lived. I climbed to the second floor: there was only one door to his place on a small landing. There were many people on the stairs and landing. I saw that if I stood in line, I would miss the only train going to the Lavra, and I would have to stay until the next day, which was unthinkable; the children had nothing to eat, and I had to find something. Politely, I decided to ask the people waiting, assuming that since these people had come to see the elder, they might have sympathy for the needs of others, and I explained the reason why I was asking to be let in without waiting in line. Unfortunately, my hope was not fulfilled; I received a rude reply saying, "Do you think that just because you used to be a lady and jumped ahead, you can do the same now? No, stand back like everyone else." I was lost in thought: I had come to the elder for comfort and advice, and I would leave without seeing him, and the children would be alone. The first inclination took over, and I decided to stay, because of the children. An elderly lady approached and said, "Don't be embarrassed, you know who you came to see, the clairvoyant. If you have such a need, he will call you first out of a thousand." I sat on the bench behind everyone. The door opened, and a small, very gray-haired, elderly priest appeared. He looked around and seemed to be searching for someone. When he saw me, he beckoned me with his finger, saying, "Come here." There were two girls at the door, and he told them, "You can leave, I'm not a fortune teller." I told him about my situation, and he replied, "Go to your husband, but I will only bless you when he replies, and he finds an apartment for you and the children." After a brief conversation, I left comforted and caught the train. A month passed, and I received no response to my letters. I went to the elder again, and once more, he did not give his blessing and confirmed that he would not agree to my departure until he received news of an apartment being found. Another month passed, and still no word, although from the railway office, I knew that he was alive and had a sufficient income. The children were completely exhausted, and I had no job. I went for the third time, "I really don't want to let you go now, but since you insist, go, and I will pray for you." A thought crossed my mind: "I live near the very relics of St. Sergius, so I do not hope for His help." Before I could finish my thought, he quickly got up, walked over to a shelf, took an icon of the Appearance of the Mother of God to St. Sergius, blessed me with it, and said, "Here, St. Sergius blesses you! Remember that I will pray for you." And his foresight was proven in practice, why he did not let me go until news of the apartment was received. Now I had to arrange for the possibility of moving to the south without having any material means for it. I still had two valuable items, but at that time, I could only exchange them for a few pounds of rye flour, and this was inviolable until the time of someone's death or serious illness.

While I was busy for two weeks, one of the most severe and sacrilegious acts of the Bolshevik authorities took place at the Lavra. An autopsy of the relics of the Venerable was appointed.

In the morning, a crowd gathered in the square in front of the fence of the Lavra, where the Relics were kept. Since there were many churches in the area, each parish had its own clergy. The gates were locked, with machine guns peering out from all the loopholes and walls. The day was cold, but neither I nor the children thought of leaving; even my five-year-old Andryusha, who was fully aware of what was happening, stayed. It was touching! Throughout the day, all the clergy conducted prayers, and in between, they sang the "Christ is Risen" hymn in a common choir. Prayers, pleas, hopes with outstretched hands, sobbing, and hysterical cries of those unable to contain their despair at the thought of parting with the Relics of such a revered and beloved Miracle-Worker, and the realization that dark forces were daringly touching the Shrine, all made an indelible, stunning impression. We stood for 8 hours. In the evening, the gates opened, and a tiny Jew emerged from them. He stood on a prepared barrel. The people fell silent. "Go and see what you worshipped - rags and bones," he said. With these words, he left, and the whole crowd rushed through the gates into the Trinity Cathedral. My children also wanted to go, but I did not allow it, despite their pleas, explaining to them that the Relics had been under a shroud for 500 years and had not been revealed to human eyes, and who gave permission? The power of Satan! They agreed with this argument. The next morning, I went to the Chernigovskiy skete to ask Father Porfiry, a revered and saintly monk known for his foresight. I saw him quickly coming towards me. I asked him if it was possible to go and see the Relics, and he said, "Let's go, let's go, let's bow to the Venerable while we can. I am going to Him myself." I went back for the children, and we went together.

It is terrifying to remember, as these were the first manifestations of demonic sacrilege and blasphemy in God's Churches. Laughter, dancing, and songs filled the church from the young communists and the youth from the Union of the Godless, with the believers' suppressed sobbing and prostrations. Everything was destroyed, but despite the atrocities committed, the Relics had an old monk standing by them, reading aloud. In the end, the blackened coffin revealed a skull with preserved reddish hair and complete teeth in both jaws. The bones were scattered haphazardly in the coffin. For those expecting to see an intact body, it was disappointing, but for those who understood, they knew that such Relics played a significant role, and each individual bone was a living Holy Relic. The monks who performed the autopsy confirmed that when they opened the coffin lid, the Venerable was initially completely preserved, but as soon as the air touched him, he immediately disintegrated. However, miraculously, remnants of the mantle were still preserved and lay near the Relics - and this was after 500 years! On the following day, Count Olsufyev and others managed to obtain permission from the authorities and invited a doctor-anatomist, who arranged the skeleton in a natural

order and covered it with a glass cover, as some were taking pieces home as a great Relic. Soon after, I left, and I do not know the further fate of the Relics. They say they were taken to a museum, and now allegedly returned and given back for worship to the faithful. But who can prove that these are the Relics of St. Sergius, and not the skeleton of some communist blasphemer? After all, the henchmen of the father of lies are aware of this and have no qualms about resorting to any deception to force people to worship him.

Through the sympathy of the railway administration, all, of course, through the prayers of Fr. Alexey, my children and I were given free tickets. They were overjoyed. Despite the hunger and extremely difficult living conditions, they never (I say this without exaggeration) lost their spirits; they were always cheerful and friendly among themselves. So, we parted with the Trinity-Sergius Lavra and went first to Moscow, and from there to the Kursk station to head south. We had seats in a passenger car. Ahead of us, something brighter and calmer was presented, but it was an unconscious feeling; the times were not such that such hopes could be based on anything; it was immediately justified upon arrival. Incidentally, there was an incident on the way that touched me.

Ahead of our carriage was a third-class car filled with Red Army soldiers. We were already in the Don region. At a large station, the red commander went somewhere with a few soldiers. They returned carrying large, round, white loaves of bread. My children were standing on the platform in front of the carriage. When they saw this, they shouted, especially the little ones: "Mommy, look, white bread." Obviously, their exclamation was more than just surprise, as the commander approached me and asked, "Why were your children so happy to see white bread?" I replied, "Because for three years, they not only did not eat it but did not even see it." He took one large loaf from the Red Army soldier's hands and gave it to my children. We arrived at a station in a provincial town between Novocherkassk and Taganrog, where my husband was supposed to be. I left all the children at the station with their belongings, and I went into town, to my husband's service office, to find out his apartment address, as I always wrote letters through the office. After receiving it, I found the house. A woman stood on the porch, who turned out to be the landlady. When I solemnly took it in his hands, placing the soldiers accompanying him under the rifle, shook it a few times, slowly untied it, thinking it was gold, and poured it onto the table. His face contorted with anger, and despite the tragic situation, I made every effort not to laugh. They recorded in the protocol: "Urusov and his wife are accused of concealing valuable coins." Apparently, the commissar did not find it possible to arrest for this and left, leaving a guard for a while. Soon there were searches again, and they took almost everything, even up to the warm knitted jacket of my little son. My husband was transferred for work to a forest area for road construction. They gave him a room in the forest in a remote guardhouse, at least a verst away from any other housing. It was very inconvenient because we had to walk far for any necessities and food. When my husband went to work, I was left

completely alone with the children. One day, a kind woman, the mother-in-law of the chief of the local Cheka, came to warn me that the authorities, upon learning that a non-communist and a nobleman were serving on the railway, had decided to shoot him. She personally heard him say this to her daughter at night. At that time, the horrors and arbitrariness were incredible. Dozens of people were shot every day (simply in the square), especially young people for refusing to join the party and Komsomol. Among them was the son of the priest, Father Georgy, who was also shot. My husband had to leave secretly, and I did not know where. On September 28th, mounted officers from the Cheka arrived with the commissar. They had a squad with them. They searched every corner and then took almost everything I had left. The first question was, "Where is your husband?" I answered randomly, "He left on a business trip for logs." "Where to?" - "I don't know." "When he returns, let him come immediately to the Cheka. If you hide him, you will be responsible, do you understand?" Poor children, how many terrifying experiences fell to their lot!

During our move to the forest, a fairly large and cheerful mongrel dog attached to us and immediately became a friend, feeling like a member of the family. She was very sensitive to any rustle and could bark to warn of someone's approach, and they were afraid that my husband, if he was with us, would not be able to hide in the woods at night since there was no door, and instead of it, there was a curtain. After they left, the dog was found dead, poisoned, still quite warm. The children cried. It was indescribably terrifying. For three nights in a row, around two o'clock, in complete darkness, I heard the sound of horses' hooves in the distance and woke the children. There was a sharp knocking, shouting: "Open up!" My daughters were already 18 and 15 years old. These people, bandits, began to sweet-talk them. It's unbearable even to remember! All healthy, not old, in large red bandanas on their left shoulders, in military uniforms, and always with rolled-up sleeves, they were devilishly terrifying. When the daughters refused to talk to them and out of fear made them tremble, one of them said, "Do you know who I am? I am an executioner, and I finish off all counter-revolutionaries personally."

We found solace only in prayer and read the Akathist Hymn to St. Nicholas before the icon given to me under special circumstances, which was our most precious Holy object and saved us from trouble many times. It is small, paper, and therefore not needed by the dark forces. On their last visit, they told me, "Today we are here for the last time." I understood what that meant. Early in the morning, we ran secretly through the forest to the nearest station, where there was a man, not a beast, a chief who, risking his life, sent us by freight train to Rostov, where my husband was supposed to be hiding, and I found him in the road administration.

19. Vladikavkaz

I understood that we needed to travel further, and the best option was to go to the Caucasus. However, arranging tickets at that time was extremely difficult, almost impossible. A whole freight car, surprisingly, was easier to arrange, as my husband was listed as an employee. He did not bother trying, confident in the lack of success. We couldn't waste time, as we felt pursued. I went to the administration myself. They sent me from one department to another. There were still many "old" people there, and all of them considered the success of my request doubtful, saying, "Even if you get the order for the car, the strict communist Chief won't sign it." I asked them to indicate his office and without a report, I simply entered it. Desperation during prayer always gave strength. He was surprised. Without further words, I said, "My request is significant, but you can do a good deed. Give me permission for a car to travel with my family to the southern Caucasus." He silently looked at me intently, and then asked, "Is it very necessary?" I replied, "Yes! Very!"

He took up the pen and wrote, "Immediately carry out my order to provide a car in the name of citizen N, intended for service in the road administration of the city of Grozny for her daughter." There was no end to the joy and surprise. The car was attached the same day, and we left. The first two days of this trip were one of the best and happiest periods of our oppressed life. On the third day, my eldest daughter fell ill with dysentery, and when we arrived in Grozny, she could not get up to go to the road manager to start work. With his permission, we lived in the car for a month; it rained, it was muddy, damp, and cold. At the end of October, when I requested for my still weak daughter to join work after her illness, an engineer, a Muslim, who was the road manager, replied, "Unfortunately, it's impossible. There is not a single free space. I explained the bitter situation to him again. After all, we were literally like beggars, hungry, and exhausted. Yes, in 1920, there was still a chance for people with a compassionate heart to help others in need. He took my car document and rewrote it for Vladikavkaz, saying, "I am the chief of the entire district and give orders to accept your daughter for work in the railway office there." I did not know how to thank him. The old car rattled on all seams again and took us back to Beslan, and from there, along a railway branch, to Vladikavkaz. There was an iron stove in the car, and at every stop, we collected coal scraps, pieces of wood, and splinters.

Upon arrival, the station management permitted us to stay in the car for only three days until we found accommodation and only because there was a document of my daughter's appointment to the railway service. She got worse again; she lay sick, and the cold was heavy. When I went with the children to collect something to kindle the stove, the railway Cheka almost arrested me, walking along the tracks was

prohibited. There was absolutely nothing to eat. What to do? I asked if there was a monastery in the city. I knew there was no place to find compassion and help for those in need like there. There was a women's monastery named after the Iveron Theotokos, not far from the station. I went there and asked the kind nuns to take me to the abbess. I was immediately enveloped in warmth by the expression on the face and the manner of this kind mother Theophany. In a short time, we became friends and loved each other. When I told her and asked for a little firewood and raw potatoes, the surrounding nuns, who listened to me sympathetically, in unison exclaimed, "Bless you, mother, to go with them and bring firewood and something to eat!"

At that time, a famine was already setting in Vladikavkaz. Almost all the property of the monastery was taken away. I returned to the car accompanied by two nuns carrying not only a bag of firewood and not just a boiled potato but also bread and fasting oil. They brought medicine for Irina. They accompanied me around the city for three days and helped a lot to find a fairly large and bright room. For three days, they brought firewood and food to the car. Irina was able to get up and go by herself. After two days, she started working in the traffic office. We started receiving her small, as they called it, ration, and everyone got 150 grams of bread. My husband, who arranged to stay in the same apartment near our room, also started helping. It was still challenging without property; we had to pay for the room, firewood, food, etc. The nuns advised me to go and ask for prayers from the former blessed Anastasia Andreevna, who was known to everyone by her first and patronymic names.

I considered it the highest happiness to communicate with people of such righteous life and joyfully went immediately. For many years before the revolution, she lived in a wooden box in the courtyard in both winter and summer. It is known that the righteous were greatly respected by Russian Orthodox believers and were considered faithful in their words, the meaning of which sometimes had to be pondered for a long time to understand. Usually, what they said was fulfilled either immediately or after a sometimes prolonged period, and their predictions or warnings became clear. Mother Anastasia Andreevna enjoyed special reverence; she had the gift of clairvoyance from God. The nuns told me that just before the revolution, on Christmas, after the liturgy, the Bishop finished the moleben and they began to venerate the cross, Mother Anastasia Andreevna entered the cathedral. She was dressed in a monastic mantle with a staff. Red ribbons were sewn all over her mantle, and under her left arm, she carried a turkey. The parishioners said, "Look at the blessed, what do these red ribbons mean, and she brought a turkey into the cathedral." "Leave her," said the Bishop, "she is not doing anything in vain; she cannot be disturbed."

After the Bolsheviks seized power, she was forbidden to live in the wooden box in the courtyard and was forced to move somewhere inside a house. She only agreed to have a tiny hut made of plywood for her, with one small window and no stove. In cold winters, the frosts sometimes reached over 20 degrees. Anyone who had sorrow went to her. I knocked and, with excitement, said the usual, "Lord Jesus Christ Son of God, have mercy on me!" From behind the door, she replied, "Amen," and opened the door to me, saying, "What do you want, Maria?" I bowed to her and said, "Mother, I am not Maria, I am Natalia," she said again, "No, you are not Natalia but Maria," and stroked my cheek, taking out apples, saying, "And these are for the children, children."

Every time I visited her, she kindly sent them pastries brought by her devotees and more, but she never ate anything herself. Even the nuns who did not take a step without her blessing were amazed at how she sustained herself. I visited the monastery almost every day. I bonded well with my fellow nuns, but especially with the kind abbess. She was not educated and seemed to come from a peasant family, but she had a wonderful, humble spirit.

20. Abbess Antonina

In 1922, I went to see her, and she told me, "I want to share a secret with you, known only to me, the Mother Treasurer, and my cell attendant, a ryasofor nun. Let's go." She led me through several rooms, and in the last one, with a spiral staircase leading to the attic, sat another abbess. I immediately understood that she was an abbess because she wore a golden cross on her chest. She was charming, not only with a kind of captivating spiritual beauty but also with extraordinary external beauty. Still relatively young. She could not have been 40, although she was. For three months, despite the winter frosts, she was hidden in the attic and only occasionally brought down to this room to warm up. The secret was well kept. Food and everything necessary were brought to her by the cell attendant only. We quickly bonded with her as well and grew fond of each other. She was very educated, from a good noble family.

She told me her story. She was the abbess of a women's monastery in the city of Kizlyar in the Caucasus. At the beginning of the revolution, when everything was being looted, especially the monasteries, a mob of Bolshevik bandits invaded, looted everything, robbed, and shot several resisting nuns.

When the White Army briefly controlled Kizlyar, someone unknown pointed them to the faces that looted the monastery and killed the nuns. They were shot. However, when the White Army retreated, and the Bolsheviks became the sole masters, they began investigating who had exposed them to the Whites. And so, she, innocent of any wrongdoing, was accused and sentenced to be dealt with. The Lord helped her escape at night, and she made her way to the Vladikavkaz monastery, where Abbess Theophany hid her. Posters were put up all over the Caucasus: "Whoever reveals the whereabouts of the former abbess of the Kizlyar Monastery, Antonina, will receive 3000 gold rubles for her head." I saw her almost every day for about two weeks. One very frosty night, with a lot of snow, at one in the morning, there was a knock on my window. Everyone woke up and got scared. Who could be knocking at night if not the GPU? I drew back the curtain and could not believe my eyes. In a white sheepskin coat, Mother Antonina was supported by the Mother Treasurer and the cell attendant Anfisa. "Hurry, hurry, open up, hide Mother."

They entered! We turned off the lights so as not to attract attention at night, and what did we hear? We heard about an extraordinary, clear miracle of God. A few days before this, unbeknownst to me, a young girl came to the monastery, introducing herself as Princess Trubetskaya. In tears, she asked the abbess to take her in, saying that her parents had been shot, their estate looted, and she was left alone in her sorrow. She pretended and managed to gain the abbess's trust, who, in her simplicity, not only comforted and accepted her but soon told her about the

secret of Mother Antonina. The girl disappeared immediately; she was a GPU agent searching for Mother Antonina. That very night, the monastery was surrounded by troops so that no one could leave. They came to search, demanding her extradition. When the cell attendant came to inform her about this, she said, "Well, what to do? If it is the Lord's will for me to be found, let it be so, but if it is not His will, He will close the eyes of the people, and they, seeing, will not see. Let's go and walk through the middle of them." They put a coat on her, and they went and simply walked out in front of all the Red Army soldiers from the gates. The commander shouted, "Who just came out of the gates, who was taken out?" They all heard because they were still a few steps away, and the Red Army soldiers replied, "We haven't seen anyone." "But how, someone came out in a white sheepskin coat and two nuns were leading her." They all denied it and did not understand what was wrong with the commander. They searched, turned everything upside down, and had to leave empty-handed. So, they brought her to me. I was, of course, happy that I could hide her, although it was very risky for us, as we expected arrest at any moment. I said, "It hurts me that I can feed Mother, as we are so poorly nourished," and the nuns said, "Yes, we will bring lunch and dinner twice a day." They sat with us until morning, Mother Antonina stayed with us, and they went back to the monastery and soon brought her food, which continued twice a day for two weeks that she stayed with us. She was impossible not to love. The children adored her soul, and even my husband, who was generally indifferent to many things, respected her and enjoyed conversing with her. At that time, there were cases where one could buy a secret refuge from the Ingush in the mountains for money. The monastery wanted to do this, but they demanded an unimaginable sum that even all the property left to the monastery after the looting could not cover. We decided that she would stay with us according to the will of God and not take any action, especially since we all grew so fond of her. She suffered terribly at the thought that if she were found, not only she but we would also be held accountable. There was, of course, a miracle and exceptional Divine Providence in all her affairs. When they did not find her during the night search at the monastery, despite the monstrous GPU surveillance, no one tracked where the nuns were carrying food to her twice a day.

Two weeks passed. I set aside a corner behind a muslin curtain in the common room with my five children, where there was a bed; above her head hung an icon, and a hanging lamp brought from the monastery was burning. One night, I saw her kneeling and praying fervently with tears all night long. I could see through the muslin, and I could not sleep; her emotional state was transmitted to me. Early in the morning, she turned to me and said, "Please fulfill my request. Go to the Blessed Anastasia Andreevna, and without saying anything else, tell her only, 'Mother Antonina requests your blessing.'" I went, and as always, she came out with a greeting, calling me Mary, and asked what I needed. I told her that Mother Antonina asked for her blessing. "Yes! Yes!... tell her not to fear anything she has planned and

prayed for, let her fulfill it, let her go to the big red government house, let her go." I conveyed the Blessed's response to Mother Antonina, and her face simply lit up. "Today, I decided to give myself up to the GPU. I am tormented by the thought that you will be held accountable for me, and if I prayed, and yet there was fear and hesitation, now, after the Blessed's words, nothing and no one can hold me back." The children and I were in tears. What could we hope for? The GPU was unimaginably ruthless. She left, bidding us farewell also with tears but with a remarkably calm face, as if enlightened and beautified. She was in a mantle and wearing a golden abbess cross on her chest. Despite all orders and demands, she did not remove her monastic attire. A little over an hour passed. We all sat silently, surrendered to sorrow, and thought about her fate when suddenly my 11-year-old Natasha, looking out the window, shouted, "Mother is coming!" She entered so joyful, so extraordinarily good that it cannot be described in words. Here is what she told us: "I went to the GPU. The guard asked for the reason. I answered that I would only speak to the chief. Others approached demanding compliance with the rules and registration; I said, 'Tell the chief that I wish to see him, and I will not obey anyone else.' They went and reported. He ordered that no one was allowed to violate the admission law; I said I wanted to speak only to him. At that moment, the door to the corridor opened slightly, and the chief himself looked out. Seeing me, he said, 'Come in.' I entered. 'What do you want?' - 'You put a price of 3000 rubles on my head; I've brought it myself to you...' 'Who are you?' - 'I am Abbess Antonina of the Kizlyar Monastery.' He was so astonished that he stood up and said, 'You? You... Abbess Antonina. And you came to us yourself?' 'Yes,' I said, 'I brought you my head.' He took out my photograph from his desk; I took out the same from my pocket. 'You are free... go wherever you want!' As I was leaving, he said, 'I must give you some punishment within a year according to the law.' No one followed her, where she went after that. No one touched us. She settled openly in the monastery, where she lived for a year. Later, I learned that she was assigned to serve for one year at a communist hotel in Rostov. She did not remove her mantle or cross. Not a single communist allowed her to serve, they all treated her without malice or insults, and bowed to her. In 1923, such facts were possible, and of course, they were possible as a continuation of the previous clear miracle. Twelve years later, I met her in Aktobe, Kazakhstan, where her son, who had been exiled there, was living with the exiled Archimandrite Arseny. Somehow I mentioned her in conversation, and suddenly he said, 'Mother Antonina, yes, I know her well, and I can tell you about her. After serving her sentence, she gathered around her 12 nuns and went to Tuapse with the aim of founding a secret hermitage high in the mountains. At that time, many monks from destroyed monasteries hoped to settle as hermits; in the mountains to escape the Bolshevik persecutions. But the GPU was smarter. Forest rangers were placed as detectives and agents, who discovered all the hermitages and dwellings of the hermits, almost all of whom were shot on the spot. When Mother Antonina climbed to the top of a large, high mountain, she met a monk from that hermitage where I

was. Our monks suggested and immediately executed digging, as we did, under the roots of giant trees like caves for accommodation, and then set up a church. We did not live long, joyfully helping them in their work. Of the 14 monks, they did not shoot me, as I was still young compared to the others, but sent me to a distant Siberian labor camp for 8 years. After 8 years, I was settled in Almaty. Abbess Antonina and her nuns were arrested, but not shot on the spot, but taken away. I do not know anything about the further fate of this remarkable abbess."

21. Famine

We lived relatively well until the summer of 1922, thanks to our daughter's work and my husband's support. My son Pyotr, who was 14 years old, knowing that he had no right to further education in higher educational institutions after completing his seven-year school due to our last name, asked to be enrolled in a four-year railway technical school. It was very difficult, and he was only accepted because the director was not a communist, and also because after completing only three school classes, he scored better on the competitive exam than most. My eldest daughter's health was poor; the harsh climate of Vladikavkaz did not suit her weak lungs. Her workplace suggested transferring her to work on the construction of a railway branch in the city of Nalchik. Nalchik was known in Russia as the best former resort for lung patients. We all gladly accepted this offer. They gave us a place about 4 miles from the city in someone's confiscated fruit garden, where we were not allowed to touch the fruits, and there were only a few trees in the garden. All around this summer cottage settlement were luxurious gardens usually abundant with beautiful fruits, but not for us. The summer passed. Irina worked until August, when the road construction unexpectedly stopped, and she was left without a job. She was not allowed to do any physical work, so from July, I started traveling to the Ossetian region, where there were Cossack villages, to work on harvesting and threshing. I would take one of the middle children with me each time, and they also helped a little, while Irina stayed at home with the two younger ones. The work provided good meals, and I would return home every 3-4 days for a day, bringing them white bread, watermelons, melons, and even pork fat. After the harvest, I brought wheat for the winter. For three months, the Cossacks still had food to eat, as the Bolsheviks had not yet started targeting them. However, a catastrophic famine was spreading across the entire Caucasus, leading to deaths in cities. The work was difficult due to lack of practice, it irritated my eyes, the unbearable heat, and I usually got one of the most unpleasant tasks, removing chaff and straw from the machine. I had to work hard all day and try not to fall behind. My daughter Tanya fed sheaves into the machine; she was considered exceptionally pretty, and my heart ached when young Cossacks teased her and, while courting her, shouted, "Come on, Tanya, don't fall behind, faster, faster." The children loved these trips because the former very wealthy village, with a population of several thousand people, often had funerals, and the priest, who sympathized with my poverty, would take us to the memorial services traditionally supported by the Cossacks. Usually, in the courtyard, they set up long tables made of boards for the occasion. Stools and benches for seating were only for the priest, deacon, school teacher, and relatives of the deceased; likely at the priest's request, they always included me and the children in their number, and all the others, sometimes over a hundred people, mainly from the cities flocking to beg for food due to famine, sat on the ground. A rich pork soup or borscht, various pies, meat stew, boiled meat, endless homemade beer, and fluffy white bread were served

as they pleased. Within a year, the Cossacks were being sent to Siberia for bourgeois activities, and the villagers were happy to ask anyone for food. The famine was intensifying rapidly. After finishing work, I would spend whole days in the forest adjacent to the cottages. At the beginning, there were plenty of wild apples, pears, and medlar. Further into the mountains, there was virgin beech forest, with trees two spans thick or more. "Where are you picking so much, Mom? Look, half the balcony will collapse." I would reply, "Everything will be useful; maybe this will be our only food and save us from starving to death."

The local population were Kabardians. They were generally peaceful people but had despised the Bolsheviks from the very beginning, not all Russians. Interestingly, if they caught a Russian and demanded to see if there was a cross on their chest, those with a cross were released, while those without were shot. Of course, not out of respect for the cross; they had heard that those with a cross were not Bolsheviks. Soon, communists - atheists who were under threat from the Kabardians for some reason - found themselves wearing crosses. The end justifies the means. When I asked them to search for potatoes in the harvested fields, they always not only allowed me but also threw a few potatoes in my basket, which we ate daily, trying to stretch the flour made from the wheat I earned. The Kabardians always carried guns. The city judge of Nalchik had just gotten married, and I knew his young wife. They went for a walk and ventured quite far into the forest. They did not return in the evening, nor the next day. A report was made to the GPU. They were searched for and found both shot dead. September passed, and we managed to survive. In October, the famine began. I took Pyotr to Vladikavkaz to a boarding school where he was placed in a dormitory. They provided extremely little and poor food. The local residents could still help their relatives who were students in some way. Due to his poor health, he had suffered from the same misfortunes as us due to the Bolsheviks. After severe rheumatism, joint and muscle pain throughout his body, after unbearable suffering that prevented anyone from touching him, the 9-year-old boy slowly recovered, but he was left with endocarditis of the heart. This happened while we were still in Yaroslavl in 1917. It was a cold day; he was suffering from a severe sore throat and a very high fever. He was already frightened and very impressionable. A servant came to inform me that several Chekists were coming for a search. A sister of mercy helped me with him. She said, "He is feverish; he will be scared. Take him quickly to the doctor across the street." I wrapped him in a blanket and carried him across the street to the doctor's. The doctor recognized him and treated him. The boy was still very scared. The doctor said that he should not be touched due to the specific form of sore throat he had. The illness was complicated, and he suffered for a month and a half, after which he developed St. Vitus' dance. For four months, he was in constant convulsions. The Lord granted him recovery, but the heart condition remained, which always made me fear for him. This was the primary reason why I could not flee abroad in 1917. For a long time, I had to carry

him in my arms, and there were two younger children as well. And I couldn't help him with food. I visited him at the end of November. I brought him wild pears, and a kind woman gave me three eggs for him. It was such a precious treasure, and I imagined how his pale face would light up with a smile when I gave him the three large eggs. Of course, I did not let go of the bag. At the Beslan station, I had to wait for the train all night; the frost was over ten degrees. It was a terrible scene all around: old people, adults, and children staggered like thin skeletons and moaned from hunger; there were bodies everywhere. I could not enter the station for a long time; it was so packed that it was a mass of living and dead bodies standing tightly next to each other. If I had not seen and experienced it myself, I might not have believed it. Despite all the care about the bag, it was taken from me. It was a real grief for me; how could I visit my dear boy with empty hands? I cried bitterly and, shivering, squeezed into the station. It seemed there was no room for a pin to fall, yet more and more people crowded in, pressing against each other. I had to stand there until morning. The Red Army soldier standing next to me accidentally stepped on the tip of my foot with his boot. Despite my pleas to move his foot, he couldn't. Many years after that, my toe hurt; it was completely black and numb in the morning. As soon as it dawned and the train was about to arrive, everyone was being kicked out of the station. Tremors run through me as I recall it. Those who could walk or move were simply pushed out, and the dead, who had died standing, were grabbed by the head and feet, thrown onto large carts, and dumped behind the station. I saw for myself that some were still moving, and if anyone noticed this among those taking them away, they cynically declared they were going to die anyway. The train arrived, and as soon as I sat down, two men burst in, they looked like crooks, speculators who were abundant at the time, and threw a bag at my feet. The bag contained something wet; I moved away, and a woman sitting across from me saw it. The bag was left there, and no one came back for it; we were already approaching Vladikavkaz. When we arrived, I waited until everyone had disembarked and no one was left; the bag was still there. I tried to lift it; it weighed a pud and smelled of herring. There was no conductor, no one. I picked it up and carried it out of the carriage, thinking I should hand it over to the police. As I stepped out, a woman was waiting for me. She asked, "Where are you going with the bag?" I said, "I want to take it to the railway police." But she said, "That's so they can arrest you! It's clear what it is. At the Beslan station, there was a search, and they were catching thieves and speculators. Those two who threw the bag were clearly trying to run away; that's all there is to it." She lifted the bag onto her shoulder and said, "Let's go quickly." She walked ahead, and I followed her in great embarrassment, not knowing what she wanted to do or who she was. After walking two streets, she entered the gate of a house, transferred half of the herring into her bag, and said, "Take this and don't be afraid, take it quickly before anyone sees." I had never been in such a situation in my life, taking something that was possibly stolen. But another voice whispered, "Pyotr is hungry; this is sent to you instead of

the stolen bag, and the owner will never be found anyway." I took it and brought it to Pyotr; although without bread, it was still food. And he was very happy about it. Later, of course, I regretted it, but the priest did not consider my action theft.

22. Nalchik

Having spent some time there, I had to go back to Nalchik. In Beslan, I managed to squeeze into a freight car almost immediately. I arrived at the Nalchik station at eight in the evening. It was impossible to walk alone for four versts. I decided to spend the night at the station and leave early in the morning. The railway police (in other words, the GPU) did not allow it and ordered to leave. I thought I would go, knock on doors, maybe find someone kind to let me spend the night; I didn't know anyone. Three well-dressed men approached me and asked, "Why are you hesitating, where are you going?" I said, "To the Dolinsky dachas." - "Come with us, we are doctors from the sanatorium. When you approach the dachas, the roads diverge, but we will escort you to the very dacha." I hesitated for a long time. There was a lot of snow that year. I was wearing men's, soldier's, rough boots because I had no other footwear. I usually wore what were called Kabardian "porshni." These were simply sewn caps with a pointed toe, much larger than the foot. Kabardians wrapped their feet first with warm Caucasian cloth, then with straw, and again with cloth on top, like bast shoes in Russia. The "porshni" were made of raw cowhide and always had to be soaked in water because they would dry out, and they were only put on wet. I did not have anything to wrap my feet, so I put the wet "porshni" directly on my feet, and they turned into icy crusts when I walked on frosty days. The Lord protected me, and I did not get rheumatism. So, a neighbor at the dacha, a young man, gave me his huge boots. I started to argue with the doctors that I would not be able to keep up with them, that I had rubbed my feet and my toe hurt, but they were very kind and insisted and persuaded me.

I did not realize that they were just looking for someone to talk to, which they were mistaken about, and so was I, as they were Soviet doctors, as I soon found out. The night was moonlit, but the sky was heavily covered with clouds, so it was sometimes bright, sometimes dark. To the left across the river, in the mountains, there was a terrible howling of jackals, or as they call them there, "chekalki." The doctors said, "Just hope we don't encounter a wolf; they wander in these bushes at night." Suddenly one of them whispered, "Quick, behind the bushes and sit down!" A Kabardian was riding a horse with a gun. Against the backdrop of the mountains, in the moonlight, in a burka—it was beautiful. Luckily, he did not have a dog with him and did not see us, otherwise, as the doctors said, he would have shot at least one of us. The clouds covered the moon, and it became much darker. Snow started to fall again. We had gone a little over half of the way when heavy snow started to fall, and the wind picked up in the cold. Leading me to where the roads diverged, they told me, "We need to go left, not along the road, but now you are near the dacha and won't get lost." It would have been useless to ask them, and I did not want to anyway, but I was scared, there was no light anywhere, and the roads were not visible. The snow fell in a solid mass. I immediately lost my balance and did not

reach the road to the dachas. I unexpectedly fell somewhere down into the snowdrifts. When I recovered from the shock, I realized that I had fallen from the embankment of a railway branch under construction. The silhouettes of the trees became visible. I found myself in the forest. I immediately lost sight of the iron road, but I thought I needed to go to the right. I walked through the woods in complete uncertainty. The clouds cleared a bit, and I began to distinguish the bushes, which at night seemed like wolves, Kabardians, or some kind of monsters extending their paws. The shapes of the thorny bushes, wild pears, and blackthorn were themselves quite fantastic, especially at night.

I walked for a long time and feared stumbling into a wild beech forest. The dawn was still far off, the cold wind was picking up, and the snow started falling again; my feet hurt. I fell for the second time, and this time I lay there for several minutes, unable to get up. The thought that my children were alone at the dacha and were probably suspecting my inevitable freezing to death nearby was horrifying. Finally, I got up and continued walking. I stumbled upon a thorny bush, feeling that it was not a single bush but as if it were a continuous hedge, and I walked touching it, thinking this must be where someone lives. I cut my hands, saw a light in a window about 30 steps behind the thicket. What if I had stumbled upon a Kabardian village? First, the wolfhounds would attack me, and then the Kabardians themselves would not greet me very kindly, especially if the dogs did not tear me apart. I felt an open passage and walked towards the light. I don't remember anything else. When I regained consciousness, I saw my two eldest daughters standing next to me, confused and in tears. Right there was an old Ukrainian man named Pavlo, his wife, and their son. The dacha settlement was very large, and, by God's grace, I had entered the forest from the other side. Pavlo's house was at the edge of the forest. The old man told me, "I heard someone scream 'help.' I said to my son, 'Did you hear that?' And he replied, 'What?' - 'Well, someone shouted 'help,' and it was a woman's voice.' My son said, 'Who, Father, in such a blizzard, a storm, and at such an hour could be walking?' The old man took a lantern and said, 'Let's go; I clearly heard it.' We went out and saw someone lying close by in the snow. 'Hey, this is our acquaintance, the lady from the dacha!' he named the street. They picked me up and brought me to their house. The son went to inform my children. This was the second time I had frozen, and the second time the Lord saved me. Snow and frost did not last long in Nalchik; it soon melted, and in December, it was warm during the day, almost like spring, but very muddy, and there were slight frosts at night. The dacha was incredibly damp and cold. There was an iron stove, but there was no firewood. About a verst away from the dacha, there was a ravine in the forest with hazelnuts and lots of dry wood growing on both slopes. Almost every three days early in the morning, while the children were sleeping, I took an axe, two belts, and a large neighboring dog that had taken a liking to me, and I went alone to the ravine. Despite the pleas of my daughters not to go alone, I did not take them for fear of encountering Kabardians; I

chopped long branches of hazelnut and tied them with the belt. Sometimes it was unbearably heavy, but I never lost heart, and everything always seemed easy to me, something that could be done within my capabilities. I dragged the bundle along the ground, threw it after walking about fifteen fathoms, then walked to the next one, and so on all the way to the dacha. With food running out, the pears and medlar were nearing the end. At the end of November, a neighbor came and said, 'Do you want some meat?' - 'Of course, we do, we do!' we answered in unison. 'Well, then come, there is a dead, still soft horse in the ravine. It looks like it broke its leg, and a Kabardian shot it.' He went to skin it, and three older children with axes that he brought them to chop the meat went with him. I say three because a few days before that, Petya, who was 14 years old, had come from Vladikavkaz. The higher-ups at the school found out that a nobleman was studying at the railway school and immediately ordered his expulsion, even though he was one of the best students.

And so, poor and completely hungry, I walked about a hundred versts on foot. A neighbor skinned the horse, and I went with two little ones to meet them. I didn't want to go with them to see the horse being chopped up. From afar, I could already hear their cheerful singing and laughter. I took one of the hind legs, which I couldn't lift, and placed the hoof on my shoulder, dragging it through the liquid mud, while the children carried it as much as they could. The same neighbor, a kind guy, also a Cossack, gave us a barrel, and he had a supply of salt, which he also gave us. He helped cut the horse meat into small pieces. The next day, we washed it in the fast-flowing river and salted it. The meat we brought lasted for a month. We ate with such joy, as if it were the finest delicacy. We finished it, and again there was nothing to eat. My eldest daughter asked: "Let me go, I will go to Batumi, they say it's good there, I will look for some occupation." At first, I didn't want to hear. How could I let an 18-year-old, although very intelligent, go alone in such a terrible time? She insisted, arguing that we would die a hungry death here anyway. Yes, desperate need could alone make me agree. She was given a free ticket on the passenger train because before that, she had worked on the railway. We boiled the last spare piece of horse meat, and I gave her the last pitiful money. She left, and from despair and self-reproach for letting her go, I could not find peace. On the eighth day, an unknown man came from the station and said, "Go quickly to the station, your daughter is calling you, she is very ill and cannot walk." Again, the same neighbor harnessed a cart and took me himself. My poor girl, she fell ill on the way back from Batumi, where she could not arrange anything due to the insensitive and inhumane treatment of people. She fell ill with typhus. She was taken out of the train at one station and put in the hospital. Only faith, prayer, and willpower could do what she did. Deciding that she would die alone in the hospital, not near me, in a high fever, she ran away, sat in a freight car, and arrived in Nalchik, but could no longer walk and lay on the platform in a corner. I brought her home. I will not forget her

happiness. I asked a doctor from the sanatorium to come after explaining the dire situation. A very responsive, forty-year-old female doctor, who turned out to be a baptized Jew, came. By evening, little Andryusha had a fever and was lying with lung inflammation. I can never forget the kind-hearted care of this doctor. She not only came half a verst away, sometimes twice a day, but also brought whatever food she could to both of my sick children. At that time, the Lord preserved the earthly lives of my children. None of the others became infected with typhus. There was no talk of isolation. Just as Irchka and Andryusha did not let me go from them, I spent most of the day and night sitting on the bed with her and Andryusha in my arms, and at night, I lay near her, with Andryusha on the other side. After a long and serious illness, they recovered.

Early in the morning, I still had to leave them and go for firewood. My husband had been gone for a long time. He left to look for work in the southern Caucasus. Something needed to be done, and we found that it was better to return to Vladikavkaz, where it would be easier to find work, and the monastery would help. We moved because we traveled for free in freight cars. It was the fifteenth of February. On the same day, we managed to find a dim room in a semi-basement—a dirty and uncomfortable one, but we thanked God for it.

Irchka was not accepted at the railway, although she lost her job only because the construction of the railway branch was discontinued. She was a bourgeois, as they called us, and the new chief, a communist, disagreed with giving her service. Despite the dire situation, her health, despite typhus and hunger, had improved somewhat in the Nalchik climate. She looked fresher and had gained some weight. I did not let her go alone every morning; she stood at the market and took any job she could find, selling pastries, doing embroidery, sewing hats, and carrying bricks, while she stayed at home with the younger ones. Against the usual laws of nature, in Vladikavkaz, cold days suddenly arrived in the summer. One day, the trees were covered with frost like in the north, and the temperature was over ten degrees below zero. I was walking through the monastery yard, where I used to go in my free time. Blessed Mother Anastasia Andreevna was walking quickly, leaning on a staff. I still visited her as before. When I wrote about her, I forgot to mention that she was quite hunchbacked. In the monastery, I learned that it was not a hump, but she carried a pood of sand on her back, tied with chains and a horsehair rope.

So, she was walking quickly, her mantle fluttering. When she saw me, she beckoned me to her again, calling me Mary, saying: "Mary, Mary, go. quickly to the cathedral and bow to the icon of the Mother of God, which is on the analogion, in the right side chapel, the Mother of God with the Child in her arms has frozen." I asked with surprise and fear, "How did she freeze, Mother?" And she said again, "Yes, she just froze.".. Then she raised her blue eyes to the sky, looked for a few seconds, suddenly

lit up with a smile, and, turning to me, said, "Just remember... not forever!" And she went on. Mother Antonina was no longer there; the nuns were barely getting by, and I could not seek their support. In the spring, there was still some work, but in the summer, things got really bad. For three months, May, June, and July, we did not see a speck of bread and survived by buying semi-rotten potato peelings, sometimes paying 15 million for a bucket. At that time, kopecks were valued in millions. These were the years of the New Economic Policy (NEP), but for us, it didn't matter and was one of the most difficult periods of our lives. One day, I was walking through the city with little Andryusha. A woman came towards us, and in her hands, she had a large white loaf. Poor child, he sighed and said, "How lucky she is." Tears streamed down his cheeks. For the first time in my life, I begged for alms in the form of a piece of bread. She broke off a piece and gave it to Andryusha.

Once, I was standing at the market waiting for a job offer, barefoot as usual due to the lack of shoes. Next to me stood a young lady holding a dress on her arm for sale. Time passed, and no one gave me work, and she started to cry. I asked, why and what she was crying about. - "My husband, a former officer, and our three-year-old child are dying of hunger. I brought out my last dress and couldn't sell it. What should I do? How can I go home empty-handed?" And she burst into tears! I couldn't help in any way, as I had nothing myself, but I said to her, "Give me your address, I have nothing, but I will think about what to do." She went home in tears, and I went and thought: "Look what I did, I gave her some hope without cause. Well, to the first well-dressed person who meets me and doesn't look like they need help, I will give them this address and ask for assistance." I had to pass through the church yard. I entered from one side, and from the other side, a lady in mourning entered. She wore an elegant English suit, and her whole appearance seemed suitable for my request. When we reached each other, I apologized and said, "Based on your attire and appearance, I decide to give you this address with a request for help." I told her about the need and tears of that young lady. She said, "Of course, I will gladly help immediately and do what I can, but could you help me with one thing?" I said, "What can I do and who can I help?" - "Do you know where I can find a certain lady (and she named my surname), I have been looking for her all over the city, and no one can tell me where she lives, in dire need with five children." I was at a loss for words but very embarrassed. "I'm not talking to you? When I saw you from afar, I immediately understood that it was you!" I replied, "Yes, that's my surname.".. She was very pleased and took my address. In the evening, a cart arrived, and some young worker brought a whole bunch of different products from her. There were white bread, Lenten oil, various cereals, potatoes, and even sugar.

In the attached note, she asked me to come to her. There is no need to talk about the joy of the children and me. The children only confessed to me that they did not want to upset me and that besides the potato peels, they were going: in my absence, to

other people's garbage dumps to pick melon and watermelon rinds and eat them. The name of the kind lady was Schneider V. P., her husband was a biology professor. For two months, she supplied us with everything we needed, and I sewed and repaired linens for her and her husband, trying to thank her with work. They left for Moscow, and I went with the children to Derbent, where my husband had found work and offered us to come with him. I was glad that we would move further south on the Caucasus, where the climate was completely different. Snow did not last more than a day, and the frosts were rare. In January, the weather was mostly like what we had back in late March in Yaroslavl. There was no need to bother about fuel, and, according to rumors, there was little talk of hunger at that time; it came a year later. There, at the markets, dubious people also started selling questionable thin potato pies filled with meat, which, as they persistently claimed, was human. This is quite possible because in places of absolute famine, people often disappeared without a trace not only through the State Political Directorate (GPU), and people frequently ate their dying loved ones out of hunger as well. There were eyewitnesses of mothers eating their children. History will one day reveal these horrors and confirm the facts, but for now, everyone is still too afraid, even those who managed to escape abroad, to dare to publish it.

23. Derbent

In 1923, my husband landed a secure position to restore a devastated horticultural and gardening school. I enjoyed nature everywhere. Approaching Derbent, I was in awe of the city on the shore of the blue-green, always turbulent Caspian Sea. It rises gently and imperceptibly into the mountain covered with vineyards. At its peak are the ancient picturesque ruins of a large fortress from the time of Tamerlane. A short distance away is the Persian quarter of actual Persian Tartars, and further down, also at a distance, the Jewish quarter. Local Jews get offended if they are called Jews and not Yids, as it was in ancient times. Down by the sea, the population is diverse, mixed, with many Russians, most of whom settled there after the revolution. The weather was warm, like in summer. The apartment we arrived in was completely isolated. It was good. A small house of the former owner of the school was surrounded by pomegranate bushes, which amazed me not only with their beauty but also with the darkness, as they were already adorned with fully ripe pomegranates, simultaneously covered with buds and beautiful red, dense flowers that looked like they were made of wax. I didn't know this was possible in nature. I was told that this exceptional property was unique to pomegranates; they bear fruit all year round and bloom simultaneously. There was no scent. Fig trees, our grapevines, almonds, walnuts, and mulberry trees (silkworms) added to the beauty and richness of the garden. Nearby, there was tilled land with dried grapevines. The fruits of the efforts of the Bolshevik hordes, who destroyed and rendered privately owned estates useless, such as the horticultural and gardening school before the revolution. The owner was Russian. The Jewish vineyards were still in the hands of the owners in 1923. It felt like we had landed in an earthly paradise. My younger daughter, who was seventeen, started working in the railway management. The eldest, who met a former officer of the Denikin army in 1922, who miraculously survived and could not leave Russia, became his fiancée.

Our happiness didn't last long. Just a month later, my husband left his job. He had no patience to stay in one place for long and was looking for something new. However, he couldn't find anything new because at that time, it was extremely difficult for a nobleman to obtain a job, and we had to move out of our apartment. It was back to searching and facing the difficulties of existence. We found a place on the ground floor in an adobe house, dimly lit and covered in cobwebs. All the better places in the city were taken. That same evening, while we were cleaning and settling in, another terrible disaster struck my poor, wonderful Irina. She, always restrained and patient, screamed with a voice that wasn't hers. I stood beside her as she shook her head away from something with a horrible cry. A scorpion had bitten her and embedded itself in her neck. I had no idea they were there. She collapsed on the

ground. Three elderly sisters who were the landladies rushed over, brought a vial of some oil, poured it into the holes left by the scorpion's sting, a couple of millimeters wide, and perhaps even wider, and, using the same oil-soaked cotton, tied it to the affected area on the back of her neck beneath her hair. It turned out to be a solution made from scorpions, the only remedy that could save someone from death after being stung by them. The pain subsided, and by the grace of God, there was no inflammation, and my dear daughter soon recovered. The beauty of nature disappeared for me. Grief and God's mercy in these sorrows were with me and the children everywhere at that time. St. Nicholas was with us. I wrote about it then because it was visible, tangible, and witnessed by His Mercy. Now, having lost all the children without exception, I understand His Mercy and rely on Him. He calls all of us, through sorrows and grief, for the future eternal life (me and perhaps even someone alive from the children). We did not stay to live in that room, despite the very friendly pleas of the three landladies who assured us that scorpion bites were not a common occurrence but rare and exceptional unfortunate incidents.

Petya, who, as I mentioned, didn't have the right to study at any technical or vocational school, not to mention higher education, expressed a desire to practically study basic technical science upon completing the seven-year school (as these schools were called), which did not provide any education. He was accepted as an apprentice at the railway depot. The expression from Tolstoy "steep hills" often came to mind. Yes, this boy, with a heart defect and a predisposition to recurrent rheumatic fever, truly experienced "steep hills." Always quiet, gentle, patient, he bore a great cross beyond his years firmly and courageously, setting his goal on education to stand on his own feet as soon as possible and be my helper. He refused the invitation to join the Komsomol. It was permissible, but those who refused were noted by the GPU and could not be sure of the future fate of their earthly life under the Bolsheviks. At that time, everyone believed that the people could not withstand God's punishment for turning away from Him, they would repent, and the end of all suffering would come, but the majority of the Russian people looked indifferently at the destruction, at the suffering of all the best people who remained faithful to God and did not bow down to the beast.

The first year was terrible for Petya. Communist engineers mocked him, sending him for vodka not once a day. And there was no hard work that they did not assign to him when no one else wanted to do it. Here are some examples. During a snowless winter, in freezing cold, a storm from the sea brought down rain that froze into small pear-shaped ice pellets. The frozen wild ducks were washed up on the shore, sparrows fell from the telegraph wires. The depot was located right by the sea. There was a leak in the tender full of water that needed to be found. The order from the communist, the depot chief, was, "Climb into the water and find the leak." All the Komsomol members would have refused, but he couldn't, they would simply

have been shot for disobedience to authority. Clad in boots and a leather working jacket, my boy stood in icy water up to his shoulders for over an hour until he found the leak. He came home covered in ice, unable to take off his boots for a long time. I thought I would lose him now, it seemed impossible for him not to get sick. But with God, all things are possible. Another time, he had to rivet the bottom of a locomotive, which was being repaired over a pit where oil drained, and again on a freezing day, lying on his back in oil, he had to perform this terrible task that could only be done lying down. The following year, the attitude towards him improved slightly, and these inhumane souls recognized in him a quiet, kind comrade, always ready to help everyone. Yes, there is much joy in motherhood about children, but the anguish of their suffering is unbearable. It would be so easy if I could take on all their suffering. After Irina was bitten by a scorpion, we were given a two-room apartment by the railway management, due to Petya's service at the depot. My husband found work in forestry twenty miles from Derbent. Petya earned very little money, but we received bread and some groceries, my husband worked and provided for us little by little. We lived extremely modestly, but it was manageable. Since we arrived at the end of September, the late grape harvest was not yet finished, and Jewish winemakers willingly accepted us for casual work, paying per bucket of any grape variety. Of course, both I and the children worked, but we were late, and a few days later, the harvest was over. The Jews were all engaged in winemaking, as I mentioned, they were still owners of their gardens at that time. The wine was made in the most primitive, probably ancient, way. In a huge trough, about a fathom and a half in diameter, three to four people stood with their trousers rolled above their knees. They stomped on the grapes barefoot, and the juice flowed out through a tap. The wine was excellent, but I always tried not to remember those bare feet. We also enjoyed collecting wheat spikes in dense fields in the mountains, which offered a wonderful view of the sea. There, the nature was tainted by an abundance of fleas, possibly from the proximity to the dirty Persian quarter; I couldn't imagine so many of them attacking, especially clinging to bare feet. My husband lived near a small station in the middle of the forest. I was very interested in the unusual vegetation for the northern Caucasus. I saw vines for the first time and how they entwined the forest. Once, I saw a small snake hanging upside down, holding onto a tree branch with its tail at a great height. What I liked a lot were the many wonderful mushrooms, including white mushrooms. I often went there and collected them early in the morning, almost near the station, dried them for the winter. Among the colossal trees – oaks, we gathered acorns for coffee. Deeper into the forest, in more open areas, wild quince grew. At that time, I wasn't working and could rest, though hunger was approaching. I went to explore the Jewish quarter. My cherished dream was to visit Jerusalem at least once in my life. Besides the spiritual aspiration to visit the Holy Sepulchre and the sanctuaries of Palestine, I was interested in the biblical structures of the cities, streets, and all the nature that I had read about and seen in paintings. Even after getting married, I was not interested in a usual trip to Paris or

Italy; I earnestly asked my husband to agree to a trip to Jerusalem, but he did not share my views, considering them mere fantasies. As I approached, I was delighted, feeling like I had reached a corner of Jerusalem. I wanted to go inside to explore the inner courtyards and rooms in detail, to get at least a superficial acquaintance with the daily life of the local Jews. Suddenly, as I took my first steps, two elderly Jewish women literally rushed at me, emerging from their houses and pulling me in different directions, speaking rapidly in their language. Of course, I didn't understand anything and couldn't figure out what was going on and what they needed from me. I managed to free myself from their grasp and quickly headed home, accompanied by unfriendly shouts.

It turned out to be Saturday, and they were not allowed to light a fire. Everything was prepared in the stove, food was ready, firewood was stacked, kindling was laid, matches were nearby, but only a Christian had the right to start the fire, not a Jew. Presumably, Muslims were also not allowed to light the fire because there were always many of them passing by, but they were not invited. I was told that I had offended the two elderly Jewish women greatly.

It's amazing and interesting how they try to bypass their laws. Opposite our apartment lived a wealthy family. Once, I saw the following scene: a carriage with a pair of good horses approached the gate. Behind it followed no fewer than thirty women in veils, but their veils were not lowered over their faces, but lifted above their heads. They carried amphorae of water on their left shoulders. They split up: two stood at the back wheels, two at the carriage steps, two at the front wheels, and the rest in pairs in front of the horses. A man and an old Jewish woman holding a newborn baby in a rich blue blanket in her arms came out of the gate. They sat in the carriage, and just as the coachman picked up the reins, all the Jewish women began to pour water on the wheels, and as the horses walked, they watered the road in front of them. It turned out that the eighth day of the baby fell on a Saturday, they were taking him to the synagogue for circumcision, and on Saturdays, Jews could only travel by water.

Their wedding ceremonies, which I saw on the street, were very beautiful. The richest fabrics of all colors, like the dresses, sparkled with gold, white veils. First came the groom with the bride, her veil lowered over her face; then relatives, family members, acquaintances, followed by the dowry. First, they carried a huge white bread, no less than an arshin in diameter, entirely painted in gold, then boxes with valuables, and further on donkeys first furs, pillows, blankets, and according to the wealth, endless chests. What became very tiresome was the wailing for the deceased on almost every street. The doors were always open to the street, and you could see women mourners sitting in a circle around a small fire, their legs tucked underneath them, with fire pans, wearing black veils, and imitating wails, lamenting mournfully.

The duration of mourning depends on the wealth of the deceased's relatives. For the less wealthy, mourning could last a few days, but the richer, the longer, sometimes up to a year. The number of mourners also depends on the means.

I witnessed how they buried the deceased. They do not even allow an hour for the deceased to stay at home, and as soon as they die, the sooner the better, they wrap them in black (without a coffin), and several men run with them to the cemetery. I saw things that I had only read about in the Bible, how they tear their hair, tear their clothes into pieces, not only in times of grief but also during arguments among themselves, and there are always arguments among them everywhere, even on the streets in public. The animosity reaches the point where knives come into play.

We stayed in Derbent for two years, and that's when Bolshevik laws began to be enforced. The vineyard plantations were no longer just counted as a whole but the number of vines and all fruit trees were now registered. Then private property started to be confiscated, and eventually, during the population census, all those who previously owned vineyards and orchards ended up in Siberia. As I later learned, these Jews, with their patriarchal Old Testament way of life and faith, did not escape the same fate. They, these Jews, were not brought up to the same level as the rest of Soviet Jewry in terms of rights and privileges.

There was nothing particularly interesting in the Persian quarter. The Jews maintained cleanliness everywhere, both in their homes and in their backyards, and even the poorest among them had a fountain. The Persians were dirty, they gave the impression of some wild people who had not even heard of basic culture, as evidenced by their celebrations and superstitions. That year, there was a total lunar eclipse. When darkness fell over the village, unimaginable sounds and howls could be heard. My young colleagues from work called my Petya to join them to witness how the Persians would drive away the evil force that had stolen the moon. Everyone, from the youngest to the oldest, climbed onto the flat roofs of their small houses with drums, pipes, copper plates, etc., and began to beat them with all their might, shouting, threatening, and waving anything they could find: blankets, rags, poker, trying to drive away the devil. They also had a national holiday every three years called Saxey-Vaxey. We did not go to see it because it ended with a young Persian, after a long and skillful jig accompanied by wild dances, receiving the highest approval of the crowd and performing a dance that brought him into a state of complete ecstasy, he would snatch a dagger and in front of everyone, he would stab himself to death. This was their sacred custom: a sacrifice to a sorceress, Lyutne, who saved ancient Persia from enemies during a war. This celebration took place for the last time that year. Despite protests from the semi-wild tribe accustomed to this tradition, the Bolsheviks canceled it. If this had been done in the name of Christianity, it could have been welcomed from their side.

24. Chechens

We barely made it through until spring. My eldest daughter (Irina) and my second daughter (Tatiana) got married almost simultaneously. Neither of the marriages satisfied me, but I did not interfere, although it was a new source of distress for me. The relief was that it pulled them out of the hungry and almost constant poverty all these years. One consolation, and of course, a big one, was that both husbands, although not particularly religious, believed in God and got married in a church ceremony without my coercion. We spent the summer. In October, the weather was wonderful and even hot. We enjoyed swimming in the sea. I was very worried when the waves rolled over our heads, and my heart skipped a beat because of the children, but then I got used to it, seeing that no one swimming was afraid, but, on the contrary, they tried to go further into the waves. The Caspian Sea is always rough, as I wrote, and crashes against the shore. My husband soon left that place and returned to us. We had to feed him, but there was hardly any food. Prices skyrocketed at the market. Speculation began, and so-called profiteering, where you had to travel far to get rye flour or potatoes. In January, I traveled north to Grozny under awful, previously described travel conditions by rail. But I was still interested in everything new. For example, such a scene: a frosty moonlit night, not far from a small station where they did not allow overnight stays, a bonfire was lit, and among the profiteers, I was there too, but not only people warmed themselves. Jackals came down from the mountains, attracted by the fire, and sat down like dogs, on their hind legs at a distance, no more than 50 paces away. They looked like either bristled wolves or shaggy ones, with fox-like fur sticking out. Their eyes glowed like little fires, and they howled and chattered their teeth. Sometimes they would start to get bolder and move closer to the people and the fire together. If someone threw a burning log at them, they would retreat, and a few minutes later, they would try again, and this went on until dawn. When a person was not alone, but several, they would not approach, but if there were many of them and a person was alone, they would inevitably be torn apart.

Petya, as a railway worker, had the right to one free trip for his mother anywhere once a year. In December of his second year of service, I decided to go to Moscow with my little 8-year-old son Andryusha. Petya and 11-year-old Natasha stayed with their father, and my eldest Irina stayed in Derbent, although in a separate apartment, but I could rely on her completely. The ticket was for a first-class car,

where the compartments for six people opened into the aisle. Most of the passengers were Jews, well-dressed (the beginning of the New Economic Policy), from Baku and Tiflis, and there were only two Persians in two compartments. Andryusha was extremely cute and cheerful, and the Persians played with him all day. Although we had difficulty understanding each other, there were a few who spoke a little Russian, and we managed to explain where each of us was going. They treated Andryusha and me to wonderful thin-skinned walnuts, raisins, and figs. One more stop remained until the Gudermes station. In Gudermes, the traffic manager was Engineer G., whom we had met in Nalchik. Knowing that I was going to Moscow, he asked me to stop by and visit him and his wife between trains. So I put a warm jacket and hat on Andryusha, as it was winter, and it was cold in the carriage. I did not put on more layers, thinking I would have time later. We arrived at the last stop, the Inche junction, at four in the afternoon. Trains didn't usually stop there, but this time it did. No one paid attention, thinking it was something usual on the way, perhaps a passing train or something else. We stood there. The windows frosted over. We stood for an hour, then two, passengers became restless, there were no conductors, and no one came to report what was happening. We stood for another hour, it was getting dark, and shouts could be heard. The train was large, and our carriage was the last one. Wild cries drew nearer, and suddenly, about twenty Chechens burst into our carriage, terrifying, in huge papakhas, all with guns and torches in their hands. In the first moment, I thought they were looking for someone from the GPU, as one shouted in Russian, "Give us money!" Then I realized it was a robbery. Before they entered our compartment, I pretended to close the door. The two Jews who were with us rushed out, a Chechen tore the door open, I tried to close it again, he hit me in the chest with the butt of his gun, and I fell on the seat. Luckily, he didn't hurt me. He smashed the window and started throwing out all our belongings. I took advantage of this, grabbed Andryusha and slipped past him and the others into the adjacent compartment, to the Persian acquaintances. There were plenty of them there, as everyone crowded into one compartment, I didn't let go of Andryusha. The one closest to the door grabbed me around the waist with both hands, quickly pulled me and Andryusha onto his knees and said, "Sit and be quiet." Another act of God's mercy. As soon as I got up, they managed to lock the door. The Chechens began to tear and beat the door with the butt of their guns. The Persians tremblingly pleaded through the closed door to let them be, all the while shouting, "Allah, Allah!" and something else. When they forced the door open, the Persians motioned with their eyes to hide our heads, which we did, burying our faces in the Persian's coat. One of them, trembling, explained something in the name of Allah to the robbers. They did not touch that compartment and closed the door. It turned out that the Persians vouched that there were no non-Muslims in the compartment. There are kind hearts everywhere, in every nation! The Chechens were looking for Russians and communists in general. When everyone left and I could regain my senses and step into the corridor, the scene was grim. All the windows were

smashed, men were screaming in despair in their underwear, and many were crying. Everything they had was taken and the gold (which they, the Jews, had) hidden on them was confiscated. There was only one other woman in our carriage besides me, and the Chechens took her, like all the women from the train. These unfortunate women never returned if the Chechens or the Ingush managed to abduct someone.

The moon rose, it was freezing, and I was without a coat, everything I had was thrown out the window. All the fabric was strewn about with suitcases, blankets, baskets, which the robbers quickly picked up and stacked on a special type of wagon. The Chechens lived (or rather, lived) in the mountains, almost on the mountaintops, and indeed, the comparison of them to eagles was accurate. At that time, there was no way to reach them by any means of transport. Now newspapers write that due to the uprising against Soviet communist laws and the regime, this entire tribe has been forcibly resettled to Siberia. It is doubtful they will be able to adapt to the climate and radically different living conditions. Clearly, if this tribe has not already died out completely, soon the memory of this people will disappear from the face of the earth.

It turned out that for two consecutive days, calls were made from the Inche junction to the Khassav-Yurt station, requesting military protection, as some suspicious groups of Chechens were descending on their two-wheeled carts from the mountains and positioning themselves near the station. The response from there was that they had recently called for an armored train, but it was a false alarm. When calls were made from Khassav-Yurt that our passenger train should depart, there was no response from the junction, yet the train was still allowed to proceed. The station duty officer, telegraph operator, and three other staff members were found tied up. When our train approached and was supposed to continue without stopping, there was no signal that the track was clear, and the duty officer was not there as he should have been. The train driver stopped the train. Immediately, the Chechens jumped onto the locomotive, tied up the driver and fireman, and attempted to break into the baggage car, but it was armored, so they failed. And for the three hours that we stood there, they, starting from the first to our last carriage, looted the train. They did not kill anyone. When they quickly started to leave, heavily loading up their carts, the passengers and conductors who had jumped out of the wagons untied the bound individuals, and the train could then proceed to Gudermes. It would have been impossible to catch them. The ponies were very small, similar to donkeys, with wheels at least a fathom in diameter, resembling a box in the middle, and incredibly fast. In Gudermes, my acquaintance met me and took me to his place. Andryusha was very scared, and so was I, and I did not want to go to Moscow anymore, but to return home. However, he persuaded me to push

through, otherwise the fear would remain forever. He gave me his warm jacket, and a few hours later, we set off. The trip there and back went smoothly.

25. Teenager's Feat

During January and February, nothing particularly special happened. Easter in 1924 was very early. My husband was ill and the weather on Easter night was terrible. Wet snow was falling in a strong wind, but I had to go to the early morning service and have the Easter cakes I had prepared blessed, despite the extreme difficulty. My eldest daughter was also unwell, and due to the weather, I did not take the younger children with me. It was a lovely old priest, Father Nikolai. Not all cities had churches, but there were still existing churches, not of the "Living Church" but so-called Tikhonite churches. When they began to carry the banners out, suddenly from all sides, masked Komsomol members in terrifying, beastly masks with horns, and even worse, more than in beastly, with howling, screeching, and barking, they surrounded the procession, trying to drown out the singing. The priest did not hesitate for a moment, and as always, everything was done as required. When they sang "Christ is Risen" at the church doors, wild screams, howls, laughter, and blasphemy reached a terrifying level. They did not enter the church, but waited in the yard, and as the worshippers started to leave, they snatched the bundles with Easter cakes, Easter bread, and colored eggs from their hands, threw them in the mud, and trampled on them. This was the situation in all cities during those years. In early spring in Derbent, the "putina" begins, which means mass fishing. At that time, we had nothing to eat again. Almost no bread was being given out on the railway. My husband had pneumonia. Something had to be figured out. I was advised to go four miles to the fishing grounds because you could somehow get fish there for free. I went with two of the younger children. The weather was beautiful. On the shore were very long, low structures resembling barns, under which were deep cement pits stretching the length and width. Right on the shore were two drives, not horse-driven but operated by semi-naked Persians, around twenty men at each drive. They spun them by walking around and wound the nets onto them. Large Caspian herrings and sometimes very large mullets would jump out onto the sand from these netted wings, which were a hundred fathoms long or more. The waiting Jewish men and women would pounce on them, sometimes snatching from each other with

fight, collect them in sacks. This is how many survived, and this is how the Lord led me to feed myself, my husband, and children with them for a whole month, selling them in the market. Besides feeding ourselves with them, I also made a little money. The head supervisor, a Russian, ordered the Jews to be driven away as they were hindering the work, and the Persians, without hesitation, beat them with sticks. They would move away a bit and then come back again and pick up the fish. Finally, they were forbidden to do this under the threat of arrest. The supervisor approached me and asked, "What makes you, an educated lady, do such work, carrying four miles of wet fish on your back?" I replied, "Extreme necessity and the impossibility of finding work." He said, "You can come every morning, and no one will touch you." This was still only in the year 1924. The fish that jumped onto the sand were not taken for pickling because it would have to be rinsed and time would be wasted, and compared to the amount of fish pulled close to the shore in the so-called bags (the center of the net), it was negligible. A good catch could reach 4000 poods or more. When the nets were wound onto the drives and the bag was almost at the shore, a whole chain of carts would pull up to it over the makeshift bridges. They would pick out the fish from the boats with large sacks, load them into the carts, bring them to the structures, pick out sturgeons, carps, and other large fish, and live herrings were poured into the pits, where two people were standing, and they were covered with salt.

Every morning, I would go with the children, not afraid that I would also be beaten with sticks. I gave the children weights according to their strength, only a few pounds each, and carried behind my back sometimes no less than a pood.

I brought the fish home, kept some for food for the day, and carried the rest to the market where one seller would take the remaining fish from me for a meager price. Everything was going well, but because of this, I almost lost my life. I believe this was the reason for my severe illness with malaria, and I lay in the hospital from April 5th to December 5th. It was raining heavily, and I left the children at home, but I had to go because the next day there would be nothing left to eat. I walked there and back four miles in the rain, with a bag of wet herrings on my back. I got soaked through, and when I came home, I shivered for a long time and couldn't warm up. One time, as I was walking home along a road surrounded by fruit orchards on both sides, admiring the blooming peach and almond trees, everything looked so spring-like, youthful, and joyful. But one thing confused me, and all of a sudden, my mood shifted to an incomprehensible anxiety. There was something unknown and mysterious in this wonderful nature. In each orchard, at the entrance, there was a straw hut. And then, on one of them, a black bird that I had never seen before perched and screeched three times with a heavy, sharp cry. It was slightly larger than a crow but all black without any markings, and for some inexplicable reason, I didn't like it. Walking alongside were two people who spoke poor Russian, and one said to the other: "There will be a dead person here today." When asked why he

thought so, the other replied: "This is the bird of death!"—he named it, but I couldn't make out the name. "Where it screeches three times, there will be death in that house." Three days after I got so soaked, I fell seriously ill and lay in bed with a high fever. Across the street from us lived the machinist, not a communist but a believer, along with his wife. We got acquainted and visited each other. They had two sons, Volodya and Vasya, aged seven and six. The street was lined on both sides with white acacia trees that had already begun to bloom. And then, on the tree right in front of my window but on the opposite side of the street, under the machinist's windows, this black bird perched, screeched three times, and flew away. I decided that it was warning me of death. Not ten minutes had passed when my frightened and agitated Andryusha burst in, saying: "Mommy! Volodya and Vasya got crushed." Despite the fever, I sat up in bed and saw: the distressed mother running with her two dead boys in her arms. It turned out they were playing in a massive pit where sand was being taken for the city. Citizens had previously informed the city authorities that it needed to be fenced off as children played there, and one side was at risk of collapsing, but no attention was paid to it. The boys played there without their parents' knowledge and were crushed by a collapsed boulder. Another incident was equally remarkable. In the house where we had two rooms, on the second floor lived an engineer, not young, with his wife and orphaned niece, a very nice 17-year-old girl named Marusya. They had sufficient means, managed to save some, and he held a good position. The uncle loved and pitied his niece, his sister's daughter, but his wife hated her. She practically didn't let her live, scolded her all day, made her do chores, and often deprived her of food. With her tears and sorrows, Marusya, whenever she found a moment, would run to me for comfort. I felt very sorry for her, and I grew fond of her, comforting her as best I could. In the same yard was another small house where a widow from Ukraine lived on the second floor with her adult daughter and two sons. This was soon after the incident with the machinist's children. I was still at home, not in the hospital. The Ukrainian widow came in tears, saying that her daughter had fallen seriously ill, and a bird of death had flown in, perched on the windowsill, and screeched three times. No words could convince her that this might not be the case. - "No, death will be in my room today." And indeed, death came to her that same night, but not to her daughter, but to poor Marusya. It turned out that two days before, her uncle and aunt had gone on a month-long vacation. They had left money for Marusya's food. And what did she do? She bought whatever she could, called her acquaintances, treated them, had fun, spent most of the money, said strange goodbyes to everyone, and then in the middle of the night, she rushed into the Ukrainian widow's room screaming, "Save me, I've been poisoned!" But it was too late to even call a doctor; she fell lifeless to the floor. Soon after, I was transferred to the hospital, where I stayed for four months with a severe form of malaria and a continuous high fever. No remedies helped. I no longer looked like a living person; I was carried out on a stretcher to the hospital garden because I couldn't breathe in the ward, and I lay there almost motionless all day.

Derbent is one of the most malaria-prone places in the Caucasus. My husband started working and didn't know how to take care of the children at all, and they could barely eat because it was a time of famine. My daughter, expecting a child, came to me two or three times, bringing coffee that they made me drink because I couldn't eat due to weakness. The younger two children spent most of the day by my side. When I worried about their food, they always cheerfully said, "Don't worry, mommy, we're full." Later on, I found out that they had come up with a scheme they really enjoyed, but they didn't want to involve me in it until I recovered. Every Saturday morning, they would go to the Jewish settlement with bags and sacks and light ovens for everyone, and in return, they were generously rewarded with walnuts, dried melon, pears, almonds, figs, and raisins. They enjoyed these sweet treats and also provided them to Petya and their father. How did they come up with this idea? Poor children probably sought out various earning opportunities. Doctors considered my recovery impossible and informed my daughter, Irochka, that I was slowly fading and there was no longer a chance to regain strength in my body. The only possibility, albeit doubtful, was to transport me back to Moscow, my homeland, to change the unfamiliar climate, but they didn't think I could handle the journey to Moscow. My second daughter lived with her husband in Rostov-on-Don.

They wrote to him asking for help to transport me. His wife, my daughter Tanya, immediately came for me. I was carried on a stretcher into a medical train carriage. When Irochka said goodbye to me, she was certain that we were parting ways forever. She knew how to hold herself together and comforted me, saying that I would soon return to them, and we would all be together again. With strong will, she didn't allow the younger ones to cry. However, when the train departed, she started experiencing pains from sorrow, and she had to be taken to the hospital, where a few hours later, my first granddaughter, Ninochka, was born prematurely, at just two months. She was so tiny and fragile that only a mother's love could keep her alive. I found out about this only in the hospital in Moscow. On the way, we had to stop in Rostov for two weeks because the doctor called to the carriage ordered me to be taken to the hospital for two weeks due to heart weakness. After two weeks, I was taken to Moscow, where I stayed for another four months. In total, from April 5th to December 5th—in severe tropical malaria, in a severe form, as indicated on the board above my head. The illness was of a completely exceptional form, and what bothered me the most was the multitude of unfamiliar doctors who constantly came from other hospitals and the Malaria Institute, bringing medical students and explaining my illness, but I wasn't free to decide whether to allow it or not, unlike other hospitalized individuals. The railway management in Derbent paid for me as the mother of a railway employee who was already an assistant fitter's son, Petia, and I was considered the property of the Soviet Union. The medical staff, mostly from the past, were very caring and compassionate. They told me that there wasn't a single voice in favor of the possibility of recovery during consultations. The longing

for my children never left me throughout the illness. When I started to recover and learn to walk with two sticks after eight months of lying down, I was released from the hospital to recover with relatives in Moscow. After a week, I announced that I was going back to Derbent. Everyone was outraged: "How can you go back there where you got malaria? We won't allow it." They called a doctor, and he said, "Under no circumstances!" Once again, relying solely on the fact that anything is possible with God, I insisted on the trip. They placed me in a carriage, paid the chief conductor to take care of me, and I left, unable to walk without two sticks yet. The journey took four days. I sent a telegram. All my loved ones met me at the station. Yes! I was happy at that time. Only Petia's pale and sad face worried me. I immediately sensed something was wrong. I saw my 4-month-old, dark-skinned granddaughter with big beautiful eyes. I didn't let go of my younger children; they were all around me. The image of St. Nicholas, which had been inseparable from me even in the hospital, brought me home. Only Petia's expression troubled me. That same day, when I asked him, he didn't tell me but let me recover from joy and rest, and then, staying alone with me, with a nervous and changed face, he said: "Mom, I'm a Komsomol member, but please don't judge me, listen to me first." No thunder could have struck me as much as this news. My breath stopped. What! My boy, my beloved son, and what I am hearing! For some time, I couldn't say a word, and then I said, "I don't know the reason, but if you don't leave the Komsomol, then I no longer have a son Petia." Pale-faced, he says, "Yes, I will leave, but hear my justification! I was summoned to the Komsomol cell and asked why I wasn't a Komsomol member. I answered that due to my beliefs, I couldn't join them. Then they told me: 'Either you sign now that you are joining the Komsomol, or a telegram will be immediately sent to Moscow to have your mother thrown out of the hospital because you, as a counter-revolutionary, will be expelled from service.' Mom! I said I would consult with my father. Well, dad said: 'Of course, join, we can't have your sick mother thrown out of the hospital.' I understood all his suffering, I knew what his decision would lead to, but I would prefer the terrible grief of his martyrdom, but I couldn't agree to that. He asked me to allow him not to declare his exit directly, but to skip two meetings held daily, and he would be mechanically considered excluded from the Komsomol. Love and pity made me agree to this because he was only 16 years old. He was 'thrown out,' in their words, but somehow, he wasn't dismissed from his job in the depot, and soon he passed exams to become a practical fitter. He was needed in the depot as a reliable worker."

26. Yeysk

A month later, I started having malaria attacks again, but not in the same form as before. I was unwell for three days, mostly enduring it on my feet, sometimes feeling healthy, and occasionally lying in bed for a week. It was decided to move to the North Caucasus to the city of Yeysk, on the Azov Sea, where the area was free from malaria and a good resort. After four months, we moved. During the journey, I was sick again, but as we approached Yeysk, I started feeling quite well, and for two years, I didn't fall ill once. Exhausted by illness, I couldn't hope for any physical work, and I wouldn't have been accepted for service, nor did I want to. My son-in-law, my daughter Irchka's husband, didn't find work right away, and unexpectedly, my husband went to Moscow to his brother, and I didn't see him for five years after that. On our first day in Yeysk, my son-in-law managed to find a small room, so small that we couldn't all fit in it, and at the same time, Natasha and Andryusha started getting whooping cough, so they needed to be separated from the weak little baby Ninochka. I was shown another room. As I came out, or rather emerged, a very plump landlady looked at our attire and bundles and said, "No, I won't allow such ragged lodgers, with such belongings, what will they do for me?" It was not easy to hear, but what could be done, I myself knew that some beggars looked better than us. There were four of us: Petia, me, and the two younger ones. The landlord turned out to be kinder and said, "Don't mind your clothes, someone else might come richly dressed, and you won't know how to get rid of them." Turning to me, he said, "By nightfall, where will you go? Here's a room, spend the night, and we'll see what God provides." We laid our rags on the shiny painted floor and fell asleep like the dead. The landlady softened the next day, she wasn't as heartless as initially thought, and by the third day, she said, "Well, live here, where else will you go?" A few days later, she brought a piece of pie or bread and asked me to come in the evenings to chat and read from the Holy Scriptures since they were both illiterate but enjoyed going to church. When we moved to a larger room after two months, it was mutually sad to part ways. By that time, Petia had started working at a junction station 50 km from Yeysk, already as an assistant engineer, and the room was very small, with no space to move around, and he needed to rest between his locomotive duties. He would come home every other day. He brought almost all his earnings home. The two months before he started were exceptionally difficult.

The priest of the cathedral in Yeysk was the old Archpriest Father Vasily, whom I really liked, as well as his wife. Andryusha was 12 years old, and at his and my request, Father Vasily took him to serve in the church. He was given a sticharion, which made him extremely happy. In a very short time, he learned to read in Church Slavonic and read very well during the service. Until 1927, he didn't miss a single service and was very proud to bring home bread or other products given to him by

Father Vasily from what he received as offerings. There was no famine in Yeysk at that time. It was a wealthy region, despite taxes and the authorities taking everything possible, local residents could still live well and generously rewarded and cared for their priests. However, there was absolutely no money until Petia got a job, and we lived extremely poorly. Once in church, I heard the priest address the parishioners, saying, "Brothers and sisters, after the service, I will personally pass around a plate and ask for your help for an educated lady living in complete poverty with three children." I didn't think for a minute that he was calling for help for me and only found out when he brought home 25 rubles. At that time in Yeysk, it was a significant amount, enough to sustain us for some time and buy milk. Petia got a job, and my son-in-law found work. I calmed down and started making rugs with watermelon honey, which was abundant there, and sold them at the market. That's how we lived until the end of 1926. In early 1927, I saw colored flowers made of wood shavings at the market. They didn't look much like real flowers, but they were selling well, and there was a high demand. I tried making them, and they turned out to resemble flowers, and I sold them instantly. From then on, flowers became a significant help in our lives whenever circumstances allowed me to work on them. As I continued, people started noticing my work, and they eagerly waited for me at the market to buy before others. I received what I thought was a significant compliment, reminding me of Ivan Krylov's fable "The Donkey and the Nightingale." Two women approached. One said, "Look at these flowers, how lively they are." She wanted to buy them, to which the other replied that it wasn't interesting: "Putting such flowers in the house, they look so lively, and we already have plenty of live things, look at that grandma, it's so interesting: the rose is red, but the bud is blue, and it doesn't even look like a flower." They bought from the other grandma. But there were also enthusiasts. I received an invitation to bring flowers to Rostov to a lady who made flowers and supplied them to a flower shop. She asked me to make as many as I could and bring them to Rostov twice a month. She sold them under her brand, and we both profited from it. Life became easier, and I could even buy meat and enjoy melons and watermelons in the summer. Of course, the financial department immediately learned about my work. They came for an inspection to check the scale of my production and the materials available. Although I had no stock, and I worked alone for a very modest living, they imposed a tax and started coming unexpectedly to check. In 1927, on the second day after Easter, I received a telegram: "Bring everything you have, with more red ones." Well, I thought, must be some Soviet funeral. I didn't have ready red flowers, but I took what I had and went. The funeral turned out to be not just one but forty people. An event occurred that indicated to believers a clear manifestation of God's judgment but angered the communists. Near Rostov, there was a colossal agricultural machinery plant. Forty workers refused to go to work on Christ's Resurrection day, saying that God would punish them for it. Despite threats, they refused. Then forty communists declared,

"We will show you how God punishes and will go to work instead of you." What they did to those who refused isn't hard to imagine.

On the following Easter, they were probably in Siberia, but neither I nor my acquaintances knew anything about them. What happened to them was as follows. Forty people got onto an open freight truck. They forced the driver, who also didn't want to obey, to go. They still had to pass through the railroad tracks within the city limits. The gatekeeper didn't manage to close the barrier, and a train coming along hit everyone except the driver, who was miraculously thrown out of the truck. They were all killed. The next day, I saw a procession of forty red coffins made up of open freight platforms decorated with Christmas trees, flowers, and red flags, accompanied by a large military orchestra. The following year, no one dared refuse anymore, and soon, there were no longer those who considered it a sin, and if there were any, which was possible, they couldn't show it openly to avoid falling into the hands of the State Political Directorate (GPU). There was another incident in Yeysk where the Lord punished a communist during a moment of blasphemy. A well-known, probably foreign professor, Protodeacon Vvedensky, arrived. It was claimed that he was a baptized Jew. There was a debate allowed about the existence of God. Of course, neither I nor any of my close ones were present, and I can only relay what was talked about everywhere. Vvedensky did not recognize the Savior as the Son of God. The attending clergy argued with him. The city commissar stood up and pointed to the clock on his wrist, saying, "It's now ten minutes to six, let's see if God punishes me, if He exists, for my words." He then uttered a terrible blasphemy against God, fortunately, I don't know the exact words, and burst into laughter. At the moment of his laughter, the phone on the table rang. He picked it up, turned pale, and rushed out of the gathering. Exactly ten minutes before six, his only son, aged ten, accidentally shot himself while playing with a revolver left on the office table. Later, I heard that this clear divine punishment was declared by the communist blasphemer as mere chance and he remained an unbeliever (and demons believe but tremble), or an enemy of God.

27. God as the Judge

As I wrote, Petia served as an assistant to the locomotive engineer at the railway junction. It wasn't a village but just a depot for changing locomotives and the long-distance crew. They sent there a young Komsomol member as an intern to take the exam to become a locomotive engineer assistant. For three months, he didn't leave Petia's side, displaying a very friendly attitude. Petia was friendly with him but never engaged in frank conversations. This man was lazy and didn't know anything at all; he wouldn't have passed the exam without Petia's help. Petia fully prepared him, and he passed the exam. When he was leaving, he said privately, "You are a good comrade, kind and helpful to me. I wouldn't have passed the exam without you, so I will help you with advice and share a secret. I was assigned to you by the GPU for three months. You can always expect this, so watch yourself and be cautious." This despicable surveillance and difficult life meant that no one was ever free from spying and betrayal, not even for a moment! This bred sinful distrust toward almost everyone one met. Even the highest idealists, after living for many years in Soviet Russia, couldn't overcome their suspicions and lack of trust. In the summer of 1926, I went to Moscow with my two youngest children. The ticket was free, and I wanted to visit relatives and go to the endlessly beloved grave of my father. A free ticket once a year was a significant privilege of working on the railway. Those who weren't Komsomol members or communists were always treated like unloved stepchildren by a wicked stepmother. All young people could study at all higher institutions, whether scientific, technical, or professional, but not them. Everyone had the right to a free resort stay, but not them. Everyone received full meals, but not them. Everyone had tourist tickets to go anywhere during vacation, but not them, and so on. So, we went; at that time, I wasn't making flowers yet, and I had no money at all. When we arrived at the Skorbyashchenskoye cemetery, a priest was conducting a requiem service nearby, and I said, "Children, it's sad; we don't have the means to pay the priest to serve a requiem for your grandfather." As we approached, we saw something shining brightly on his grave, like a piece of glass in the sun. We came closer, and there lay a brand-new fifty-kopek coin, as if just minted. We were amazed. Andryusha happily ran up to the priest, asking for a requiem service. At that time, silver 50 kopeks were valuable. There were always many miraculous occurrences and immediate divine retribution in the much-maligned Russia, as well as miraculous salvation through faith.

1. "Prophet Elijah"

A nun who lived in the village of Kavkazskaya (Central Caucasus) told me that on the day of Prophet Elijah (July 20), all the villagers were harvesting wheat in the collective farms. The sky started to fill with clouds, and they began to hurry. Traditionally, on the day of Prophet Elijah, there is almost always a thunderstorm, with very few exceptions, and this is not a superstition but a true fact observed by me throughout my long life. Some started persuading others to hide, pointing out the day of Prophet Elijah, in the barn, as a dark cloud was rapidly approaching, and the ominous rumble could be heard almost directly above their heads. One of the collective farm chairmen, a communist, allowed himself a blasphemous remark, addressing Prophet Elijah; I won't repeat his words but will say that he invited him to come to them on his chariot. A hearty approving laughter ensued. Two young women were frightened by these words and rushed out of the barn, where everyone had gathered due to the pouring rain, saying, "Watch out, lest Prophet Elijah really come to you." They ran to a large oak tree standing alone in the field and took shelter under it. A thunderous clap followed by a blinding lightning strike hit, causing the barn, along with all those who had been laughing at Prophet Elijah, to burn almost instantly. The two women only got wet.

2. "Stranger"

My sister, who was left behind in Moscow, not arrested despite being a lady-in-waiting but left for reasons related to the authorities, which I will mention elsewhere, told me about something she heard personally. She was standing in line for kerosene, but most importantly, she wanted to buy high-quality artificial oil for her lamp. Of course, it wasn't sold for that purpose, but believers understood why elderly women bought it. The line was very long, and she would have to wait, possibly for hours. So, she asked around if they had any high-quality oil. Standing next to her was a young firefighter in uniform. He turned to her and said, "Oh, grandma! That's not in fashion nowadays." Thinking it was a mockery, not considering anything else, she replied, "For you young people, maybe it's not in fashion, but for us, it was and will always be in fashion."—"Don't think it's a joke on my part; I came here myself for oil for my lamp." A sympathetic laughter erupted from many faces. "In our village, an extraordinary miracle occurred, one that is impossible to disbelieve and, of course, impossible not to believe in God. I saw it myself, and no force can make me doubt it."—"Tell us, tell us about your miracle," some asked, mockingly, while others trembled with fear of God. But there were very few, apart from my sister, who felt this way. "I will gladly tell you, without hiding

anything," said the firefighter. Everyone fell silent. "In our village, there was a poor beggar woman. She was born crippled, almost without legs, and crawled on her knees her whole life. Those who knew her would tell you: For forty years, she crawled to the church porch and begged for alms. A meeting was scheduled in our village council to discuss identifying kulaks (the most hardworking and sober peasants), dekulakization, and their expulsion. Everyone was required to attend. The poor beggar woman crawled there and stayed by the door. Suddenly, an unknown woman, dressed entirely in black, entered, leaned over her, and said, 'Why are you here? This is not your place! Follow me!' She went out, and the beggar woman crawled after her, and the cripple said, 'Have you always been like this?' — 'Yes, since birth.' — 'Do you want to be healthy?' — 'How could I not want it, mother!' — 'Well, go with God.' With these words, she vanished, and where did the beggar woman's legs come from! She stood up and walked home on her own. The whole village gathered; even the unbelievers couldn't deny it. Everyone knew her. The entire area was in a commotion; everyone came to see. The authorities got involved, and even they were alarmed, sending the State Political Directorate to investigate. They couldn't say anything; the evidence was clear. So, they declared it witchcraft and accused the deacon's daughter, locking her up in the basement, promising to deal with her for disturbing the neighborhood with her witchcraft. The same woman who healed the cripple entered and asked, 'Why did you imprison the deacon's daughter?' — 'Oh, she somehow disturbed the entire population with some unknown means.' — 'The deacon's daughter is innocent; release her. I did this; lock me up instead.' So they did; they released the deacon's daughter, and the woman was locked up with a large padlock. When they unlocked it the next morning, no one was in the basement."

Everyone listened in silence; each interpreted the story as they wished. There is no doubt that for revealing God's miracle, he became a martyr for the faith.

3. "Pioneer"

Another interesting story I personally heard from the Sisters of the Botkin Hospital in Moscow. There, in 1927 or 1928, I can't remember, a 10-year-old girl was lying, very seriously ill with spinal tuberculosis. She suffered incredibly. The entire hospital staff was involved in her case. The girl was quiet, gentle, and had been suffering for over a year. Everyone was just waiting for her death as a release from her suffering, but death did not come to her. Her parents were simple peasants from a village near Moscow. Every morning, her sister brought milk to Moscow and visited her every day. One day, the girl woke up in great distress, shedding tears, but she didn't want to explain the reasons to anyone. When her sister arrived, she told her, "Last night, I dreamt that I was walking up a white staircase that reached the sky. Many people, adults, and children, including girls like me, were walking. We walked for a long time and saw a great light at the end. When we reached the light, we saw that the Light was coming from Someone standing at the very top. Some He allowed into a large bright door, and others not... He kindly let two girls who were with me through, but stopped me: 'You can't come here; you're a pioneer,' He said. And she asked her sister to go to the school teacher, who was in charge of the school, and tell him to remove her from the pioneer list. She begged so tearfully that her sister went to the teacher and asked him to remove the girl from the list. He

replied, 'What nonsense, some sick delusion, I won't remove her; she'll remain a pioneer. Tell her I removed her, and that's it.' On the next day, when her sister arrived at the hospital, she found the sick girl still in tears. She had the same dream, and when her sister, trying to calm her down, told her that she had been removed and was no longer a pioneer, she replied, 'It's not true! It's not true... He didn't let me in. Go again, tell them I don't want to, ask them to remove me, and also go to the church and ask the priest for a big red book for me. Once, when no one was looking, I sneaked in to see what was in the church; I had never seen it before. The priest had a big red book and was reading aloud. Ask him to give me that book.' She said all this lying motionless. She hadn't been able to lift her head for a month. The hospital sisters said it was heart-wrenching to see the sorrow of this dying child, and in this sorrow, there was something special that touched the soul with fear. They told the milkmaid to demand her exclusion at all costs. She went to the teacher and didn't leave him alone until he removed the girl and tore up her document. Then she went to the priest and told him everything. He was shocked. The big red book was the Gospel. 'I can't give you the church Gospel; here, I have some torn pages from a damaged Gospel, take them to her.' The next morning, when she entered the

hospital room, to her surprise, she saw doctors and sisters surrounding the girl. She was sitting there, joyful and completely different. She extended her thin stick-like hands, took the torn pages from her sister's hands, held them to her chest, and said, 'He, the Bright One at the top of the stairs, told me, "Today, I will take you with Me; you are no longer a pioneer." Saying this, she lay back on the pillow and breathed her last. The Lord took her with Him. To a person who believes, who knows what being a pioneer means, this story is undoubtedly a possible fact and can only be touching, not surprising. In most cases, these were unbaptized children. I won't delve into the reasons that led parents to hand over their children to Satan from birth. Whether out of conviction, fear of arrest and exile for baptizing a child, or other motivations, the fact remains that instead of the Holy Sacrament of Baptism, the ritual of Octoberization was performed on children. The children were called 'octyabryata' in honor of October 17, the day of the Bolshevik revolution in Russia. I don't know what this terrible ritual entailed because I never attended it. Besides indifferent people who attended the ceremony for the refreshments, there were only communists. Children were octyabryata until the age of 6, after which they mechanically moved on to the next stage — the pioneers, and then, from the age of 16 — the Komsomol, where they independently pledged their renunciation of God. I can give the following example:

4. "Komsomol Member"

My younger daughter had a friend, Lena M. Her mother, a believer, did not want her daughter to join the Komsomol under any circumstances, and she was not a Pioneer; she had been baptized. Lena had a brother who was a former officer of the White Army living in Serbia. Their father, a general, was killed in battle. The brother wrote to Lena that if she joined the Komsomol, she should know that he would disown her. (During the times of Beria and Yezhov, such a letter could not have reached her). Lena had exceptionally long and beautiful hair. Two thick braids reached below her knees. Her mother was very proud of her daughter's hair. One day, Lena came home from somewhere, and her mother was horrified beyond imagination: both braids had been cut off to the scalp. In response to her mother's frightened question, she declared, "I am a Komsomol member." The naive girl succumbed to propaganda and, having been taught not to warn her mother, she cut her braids according to Komsomol rules. The mother could not console herself and was ready to disown her daughter, but Lena had not yet taken the oath. The initiation ceremony was kept a deep secret, and I did not know the essence of it until I heard it from Lena herself. Just as unexpectedly, she came home one day in spring and announced, "I have left the Komsomol!" This news both delighted and moved her mother, as I wrote about my son, everyone knew what awaited those who left sooner or later. Here is Lena's

story: "All of us who were to be initiated were taken to the forest, where a bonfire was lit on a clearing at the edge. While we were making all kinds of sworn promises, raising our hands, everything was fine. But when I was told to jump over the fire three times and at that moment pronounce a terrible renunciation of God, I refused and did not agree for anything, and I declared that I was leaving the Komsomol." She was 16 years old.

5. "The Trial of God"

At that time, my son Andryusha was studying at a seven-year school; he was 12 years old. The Russian language teacher announced that there would be a dictation titled "The Trial of God." Andryusha put down his pen and pushed his notebook away. The teacher saw this and asked him, "Why aren't you writing?" — "I can't and won't write such a dictation." — "How dare you refuse? Sit down and write." — "I won't." — "I will take you to the principal." — "As you wish, you can expel me, but I will not write 'The Trial of God'." The teacher dictated and left. Andryusha was summoned to the principal's office. The principal looked at him with surprise. It was an unprecedented sight: a 12-year-old boy so firm and unwavering, yet calm in his responses. The principal, it seems, had a spark of God in his soul somewhere, and he did not dare to disclose it, nor did he dare to report me, his mother, to anyone, and simply said, "You are brave, go!" What could I say to my dear boy? I embraced him and thanked him. All of this was strung together, and in 1933, at the age of 17, he was sent into exile for the first time. [He later met a martyr's end].

6. "Satisfied"

I was acquainted in Yeisk with a man of high standing, the owner of a large horticultural farm. His greenhouses had been confiscated, now standing empty, as the fruit trees and flowers, for which he had received numerous gold medals at exhibitions, were cut down and burned. He had a small remaining and wonderful garden at his modest home. Everyone in his family was believers and mourned bitterly the fate of the Sovereign and the entire Imperial Family. Sometimes he couldn't contain himself and with tears remembered them, of course, only among his own. But one night, they came for him, arrested him, and took him away. Two months later, news arrived that he was in a prison in Kharkov, along with a former military commander of Yeisk. After two years, he was released. He soon fell ill and died, unable to endure everything that was happening. He told me an interesting and characteristic episode during his imprisonment.

They were housed in a cramped common cell, sleeping on dirty mats and fed mercilessly and poorly. One day, the prison chief called both of them by name and ordered them to follow him. Everyone knew that when called without their belongings, it meant they were going to be executed, as interrogations had long been concluded. Well, they thought, this is the end for us. They were not put in a black crow, but in a car. They were driven around for a few streets and stopped in front of a nice house. They were led through a large bright corridor, the door was opened, and they were let into a clean room with two beds covered with good blankets. Each bed had a table with matches and cigarettes on it. They were taken out of their dirty prison clothes and dressed in clean robes. While the guard did not leave and lock the door behind him, they could only exchange surprised looks in silence. When they were left alone, they started scratching their heads and making assumptions about what it could mean. At around 10 pm, a delicious dinner of two dishes was brought in. During dinner, the door unlocked, and the prison authorities entered along with two Englishmen and an interpreter. The chief addressed them and said, "Look at the conditions in which our intelligent prisoners are held. Ask them yourselves if they are satisfied." Of course, we answered that we were satisfied. The Englishmen praised everything and left. An hour later, we were dressed in our dirty clothes again and taken back to the same prison, and the same cell. Any comments are superfluous.

28. "Women Executioners"

At that time, we lived in an apartment with simple and very good people. They had recently gotten married. He was the son of a small tradesman who had passed away a few years before.

The young master, as the son of a merchant, was already stripped and ruined. One night, there was a knock on the door. The frightened landlady answered, and a soldier from the GPU was there. "Come, you will be present during the search of your landlords' belongings." Unpleasant business, but one could not refuse. The accusation was that a small debt was owed by the young master's father, and therefore a decision was made to confiscate the son's property as the heir. They began to list everything. The hosts obediently kept silent, all items were entered in the protocol. The searcher saw a pair of gold watches on the table, with a swift, perhaps habitual, thief-like movement, he hid them in his pocket. The host noticed this and said, "The watches should also be included in the inventory, why did you hide them?" Then the representative of the authorities whispered in his ear, but in a way that I could hear: "Say another word, and you won't be pleased when I settle the score with you." This was a common tactic used by those conducting searches in the name of the law.

In 1926, life was becoming worse than slavery for everyone. All movable and immovable property was being confiscated. In Yeisk, there was a fruit garden next to every house. Mostly apricot trees and many peach trees. In spring, a commission counted all the trees and imposed a ban on harvesting. Owners were allowed to pick up fallen fruit, but only until the state harvest began. Outside the city, a cannery was being built. The harvest that year was exceptional. The factory was not ready by harvest time. A huge amount of laborers took away the shaken apricots. Apricots, by the way, are never shaken; they are carefully picked, especially when they are ripe, as in this case. They were piled up in thousands of poods. When experienced individuals pointed out that the good produce was going to waste, the usual response was to mind their own business since it was not their concern. The supervisors were either thieves or criminals, and everywhere, shepherds were held in high esteem, completely illiterate and dull individuals. Within three days, all the gardens in the city were looted. The next day, huge piles settled, and streams of juice flowed in all directions. It is clear that it all went to waste. No preserves were made, not even vinegar could be produced, as there were no barrels, and the entire mass had molded and dried. Such examples are countless.

When we lived in Nalchik, early in the spring, an agronomic demonstration commission arrived, consisting of inexperienced boys who had completed accelerated courses. Their purpose was to teach the Kabardians and local Russian peasants how to sow millet, a crop they had been planting for centuries. The

peasants and Kabardians requested to be allowed to sow as their experience had taught them, but the "learned" youth did not agree. They decided as follows: "We will sow one demonstration plot, and you sow another, we will see who does better." They plowed the land and brought in the seeds. The peasants whispered to each other and chuckled on the side, but they agreed not to show it. They sowed and then dispersed. Thick millet shoots sprouted on the peasants' plot, while there was nothing on the commissars' plot. The peasants' millet was already bearing grain, while the commissars' land was bare. What happened was that the young agronomists had sown not millet but peeled barley. Of course, one could only laugh in privacy or with clenched fists, to avoid ending up in the GPU. At that time, unheard-of atrocities were taking place. Anyone who disagreed with the collective farms was arrested immediately. Kulaks were stripped of their possessions and exiled to Siberia, supposedly for profiting off the exploitation of labor. Who were these kulaks? They were the best land workers who had not squandered their property but, working from dawn till dusk, managed to build themselves a small home, plant a few fruit trees, and in the best case, have three pigs and three cows. They were arrested even for owning two cows if the owner had a worker. When I pass by peasants in Germany today and see even the poorest with 6–7 cows, and the wealthy with dozens, the disgraceful picture of Soviet looting comes to mind. Arrests began in the midst of the harvest season. Innocent men were rounded up like sheep, held in sheds sometimes standing close together without food for 2–3 days while their alleged guilt in their prosperous lifestyle was investigated. The chairmen were former idlers, drunkards, but mostly shepherds. The worst were the female judges; they always turned out to be the cruelest, with special reverence given to the cattlemen. The Holy Prophet David said: "Woe to that nation where the lowest of the people are elevated, for then the wicked walk everywhere." How true these words are in relation to the ruling Bolshevik horde.

At Caucasus stations, one could encounter a woman in a red scarf with a terrifying appearance, known as Maruska. All doors opened before her. Approaching the buffet, she presented a paper to those who did not know her and demanded everything she wanted for free. I inquired about this person and was told that her merit had been highly appreciated by the higher authorities. She was advanced in tormenting officers and would personally gouge out their eyes with a heated knitting needle. It was said that she became insane, had seizures, and became mentally disturbed. In Taganrog, I had an uncle, a very good and respected doctor. He told me about all the initial savagery of the revolution, where not only the legalized monsters of the Cheka and later the GPU were active but also anyone who wanted to torment landowners, military personnel, and simply wealthy individuals - this was encouraged and rewarded by the authorities. My uncle had to deal with such people many times. The Judgment of God befell them even on earth, the most horrible. They saw an evil force, it haunted them during the day but especially at

night. They reached the point of having seizures, were ready to give up all their loot, begged for sedatives to forget, yet the bloodied images became clearer before their eyes. Likely, if not for these visions, they would have continued their deeds calmly. What medical remedy could help against this? There were many such afflicted individuals among sailors; they would fall, foam at the mouth, and thrash around, especially in large crowds. I had to witness this at Rostov-on-Don station. In 1944, when I was in Prague, I saw a priest who had escaped from Soviet Russia. Over tea at the bishop's house, he told an interesting story, which I will relay in his words: "Before the revolution, I was a cathedral churchwarden in Saratov, had a good fortune, and my own house. In 1920, I was arrested for this and transported on a boat along the Volga with 40 other people to the middle of the river, where we were placed in the hold of a barge at anchor. There were different people, including clergy. Among them was a venerable bishop. The conditions were extremely harsh, but we, all believers, found solace in conversations and communal whispered prayers. One morning, three arrested sailors were brought to us. It was bad, very bad before, but with their arrival, life became unbearable. They tormented us day and night, stooping to cruelty. When we received parcels, they took everything, kept the best for themselves, and threw the rest overboard. We tried to protest, tried to persuade them, especially the humble bishop, but it only made things worse. We starved, but complaining was not an option as it would have resulted in worse treatment from them. This went on for about two weeks, when these three sailors were called to the deck for interrogation. Three hours later, they were brought back with their hands tied behind their backs, sentenced to execution. Despite all their cruelty towards us, everyone felt pity and wanted to say something, to encourage them, which we tried, especially the bishop. What comfort could one offer to a raging godless individual? We asked them what they wanted. One asked for food, another to smoke, and the third remained silent and grim. When we all settled in for the night, I lay in a fur sack that I had with me, as it was autumn and cold, I couldn't sleep. Suddenly, this third sailor approached me and said: 'You, as I saw, deal with the clergy, so tell me, where is your God? If He existed, He wouldn't have allowed me, completely innocent, to be sentenced to death for a deed I did not commit. No, there is no God!' And I said to him: 'Why do you assume that God is punishing you specifically for this deed you speak of, claiming innocence? Perhaps you committed some other serious crime in the past?' And he replied: 'Yes, I killed our captain out of revenge, and when his little son rushed to defend him, I killed him too.' —'So you see, as an unbeliever, you have not repented, and that is why you must now suffer, but God is Merciful and Forgiving. Even now, He could forgive you and save you from death if you prayed to Him.' He nervously and quickly said: 'Teach me, tell me even a short prayer, and I will pray.'" I began to think about what words to say to him, and suddenly I forgot everything, unable to recall a single word, while he begged. All I could remember was to say: "Lord, have mercy." He stepped away, and I saw him praying for salvation. I fell asleep towards morning, but we were soon

awakened by a shout summoning those three. Soon, a gunshot was heard. We all crossed ourselves when suddenly the one who had prayed burst in shouting: "There is a God, there is a God!" When he regained composure and calmed down a bit, he said: "I prayed and kept saying: 'Lord, have mercy.' Eventually, I grew tired and dozed off a bit. I see an old man approaching me so kindly, saying: 'Do not be afraid, the Lord heard you, go in faith.' When we were lined up, and the triggers were pulled, one of the two sentenced individuals said: 'Wait, release him, he correctly showed that he was not involved in our affair and is innocent.' They untied my hands and let me go." He left the barge entirely.

"For a whole year, I heard nothing about him," continued the priest. "I was released after a month. On Easter morning, as the churchwarden, I arrived at the church before everyone else and saw a man kneeling, with his back turned to me. His figure seemed familiar. I approached closer to the icon of Christ before which he was praying, and I saw that he was crying. I did not want to disturb him and left. Then I remembered who this man praying with such faith was - it was the saved sailor. After the early morning service, he confessed and partook of the Holy Sacraments. At the end of the service, he handed me 50,000 rubles as a gift for the church, but I found it inappropriate to accept them because he himself said that this money was earned through crimes, and he did not want to have them now. He pleaded with me. We went together to the bishop, but he, too, found it impossible to accept them for the church's needs. Then he said: 'This money is the price of tears shed by some people. I cannot return them to those people, so let me give them to others in need; let some benefit from them at the expense of others.' The bishop agreed, and these funds comforted many poor families. This was in 1920. All the arrested individuals undergoing interrogations, the GPU investigators assert that there is nothing more horrifying than female interrogators. There are women executioners who, holding a revolver in their hands, still flirt with their victims before the killing."

29. The Righteous

Despite witnessing many horrors over 25 years, I also experienced miraculous acts of God's mercy. Some people of righteous life were protected by the Lord from violent death at the hands of the Bolsheviks. The greatest joy and comfort came from meetings and encounters with them.

While in Rostov selling flowers, I heard about the wonderful 106-year-old elder, Father Ioann Domovsky, residing in Rostov in a small separate house. Visitors came to him from morning till night seeking advice and solace. There was a clear miracle of God's protection over him from the GPU. They had come several times to arrest him, but the GPU, with its physical and satanic force, could not touch him.

Believers kept watch day and night; a crowd would instantly gather near his house. Certainly, it was impossible to resist the satanic force without God's help. The elder passed away in his cell in 1927 from old age.

I visited him twice, and a wondrous reverence emanated from this ancient yet spiritually youthful elder. He mostly lay on his bed and received visitors without getting up, dressed in a cassock. Sometimes he would rise and approach the corner where many icons hung, and numerous oil lamps were placed above a table covered with a cloth, where he conducted services. He was tall, not bent, and one could paint a picture of an Apostle based on him. The first time he received me, he talked without standing up, and the second time, he rose and prayed in the sacred corner. When he dismissed me with a blessing, and I had already left the door, he called me back by name. I returned, and he was still standing in the corner, wearing an epitrachelion. He placed his hands on my head and silently prayed for a few minutes, then slowly blessed me with a large cross, saying, "From imminent death." I understood that he had removed something dreadful, a threat visible to him through his insight. I had been in situations of inevitable, seemingly impending doom, and I always remember his words and blessing.

During my first visit, the assisting nun let me in while he was still attending to another woman. She wasn't just crying but wailing, pleading with him about something. As I was nearby, I overheard the conversation as he did not ask me to leave, perhaps to further strengthen my feelings and beliefs towards the Communists. "Father, I love him, I have several children with him, how can I leave him? He is my husband!" she said. He replied, "Leave him and go, a believer in God cannot be the wife of a Communist." So she left in tears under his prohibition, and in his final words, he said to her, "There will never be forgiveness for this."

In that same year, I was in Rostov when a massive cathedral was being blown up. Luckily, I did not witness this shocking scene, but the entire city trembled, and a thunderous, dreadful sound was heard. The next day, I saw piles of destroyed

stones. I did not approach closely; it was frightening, and involuntarily the prayer came to mind: "Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered." Soon, the cathedral in Taganrog was also detonated. It had a massive golden dome supported by 12 very beautifully and colorfully painted Apostles. During that time, churches were being destroyed throughout vast Russia. Typically, the destruction began with cathedrals being detonated, followed by churches. All valuable items were selected in advance: sacred vessels, vestments, lamps, and anything made of gold, silver, and precious stones. They took away items and icons of ancient artistry and craftsmanship, considering them valuable, while the rest, even if miraculous, were destroyed and desecrated. All these items were sold or given to Jews for resale abroad. It is hard to imagine the volume of valuables that were looted and partly taken out of Russia or dismantled by representatives of the authorities. After all, the imperial jewels were worth billions. In the old estates of Russian nobility, there were various works of art. In my grandmother's estate, there was a large painting that I remember being very afraid of in my childhood: two medieval knights in life-size, an original by Rembrandt. This painting was brought from Versailles. My mother's grandfather, the renowned Cossack ataman Count Platov, received it and other valuable items as gifts from France at the signing of the peace treaty in Paris after the end of the war in 1812. The painting belonged to my mother's elder brother, my uncle. At the beginning of the revolution, he was imprisoned as a landowner and leader of the nobility. The entire estate was looted, and the Rembrandt disappeared. At that time, they still left some churches for the living and for the renovationist churches. Of course, no true believers went to these places of blasphemy. I cannot call them churches. When the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow was detonated, which was entirely made of marble and delicate mosaic inside, starting from the huge icons by famous artists to the floor, you could see how they carried away the remnants of these mosaic saints from the heaps of rubble on trucks and turned them into rubble, using the holy mosaic remains of the icons to pave the streets. This was done so that people would trample on sanctity under their feet. Whether willingly or unwillingly, one had to walk on such sidewalks and streets. All the luxurious metro system, which the Bolsheviks boast about, was built from the multicolored marbles of the destroyed ancient churches and monuments from demolished cemeteries. Garbage and manure were collected in bags sewn from expensive golden and silver vestments. A park with various amusements was built on the site of the richest cemetery, the Skorbyashchensky Cemetery, near the former Skorbyashchensky Monastery, which was completely demolished. My father, who passed away in 1914, was buried there.

Family members were asked to open the graves and move the coffins with the deceased to the Vagankovskoye Cemetery. At that time, I was in the Caucasus. My sister moved our father. It was extremely difficult and costly, but she managed to conceal some things that the GPU did not find. It had been ten years since his

passing. A zinc coffin was placed under the old one, and it was moved in 1941 to a location many versts away from Moscow because a lake was to be dug at the site of the Vagankovskoye Cemetery for sports and recreation. I do not know what my sister did with the graves of our father, mother, brother, and other sister, but I did not have the means to move my daughter, who had passed away in 1930. It was announced that all coffins left in the ground would be excavated and burned. In June, the war began, and I do not know what happened after that. Typically, entertainment venues like cinemas, cafes, beer halls, etc., were built at the sites of the former churches. At the altars, people danced, engaged in debauchery, and fashionable studios were established. Where there were once altars, people undressed, trying on undergarments and dresses. I do not delve into the details of the renovationist and living churches because I simply was not interested in the work of the cunning and do not know it in detail. One thing I know is that ordination was not required; priests were appointed randomly just to undermine the authority of the true Apostolic Orthodox Church. Priests could divorce, remarry without restriction, attend theaters, cinemas, taverns, etc. Bishops were also married and did not refrain from revelry. In their free time, they wore civilian clothes. Baptisms and weddings were prosecuted until the war, and it was forbidden to bury with a priest until the false patriarch Alexy took office, and they forcibly tried to make people have funerals with music. How much unnecessary grief this caused for many. Until 1930 or 1928, I do not remember, free cohabitation was allowed without age restrictions, even without registration. The scenes in joint schools were impossible to describe. Girls as young as 14 often became mothers. The state took away the children, and the mothers continued their education. At some point, civil registration was introduced, even for singers. Godless propaganda was everywhere. Posters were glued on the walls of houses and institutions: "Religion is the opium of the people" and "Propaganda is our weapon." The GPU visited private homes to check for icons, and those who did not willingly remove them were eventually arrested and initially exiled for five years, and after ten years, they disappeared without a trace, deprived of the right to census. So, I had already lost my two younger sons, Petia and Andryusha, for their faith and unwillingness to compromise. Starting from the first day of the revolution and throughout my time in this hell, a lamp always burned in front of the icons. I was not arrested only due to political lies to foreign embassies. They were fed the lie that only politically guilty individuals were exiled, and as proof, I was cited, along with my sister in Moscow, a lady-in-waiting to the Empress, and other old ladies and gentlemen from prominent families who were not arrested. It was all the same vile lie. I personally lost 12 members of my family and seven from my husband's side. My 18-year-old niece was in 1922.

She was captured on the street for speaking English with an acquaintance. She was held in solitary confinement for a whole year under extremely harsh conditions, accused of espionage. She had been raised by an English governess from birth, and

all four of her brothers and sisters perished for it. Her brother, her father, had just lost his wife, but she died in the hospital. On this daughter, intelligent and exceptionally good, he could only rely on in his grief and have as a helper in raising the three younger children. He begged, proving her innocence, but all in vain. After a few months, she fell ill with a severe form of tuberculosis. In the spring, she lay in the prison hospital. On the 4th of May, the situation was hopeless, and her brother was allowed a meeting. Both he and the poor sick girl begged to be released to die at home. It was not allowed. She passed away on the 6th in the morning, and at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, her brother was notified that his daughter had been mistakenly taken, falsely accused of espionage, and he could take her home. What a wicked and characteristic satanic mockery! Her body was given to her brother. Two years later, the next brother after her was called up for military service and taken to Odessa. A month later, his death was reported. How and why he died is unknown, but possibly also for speaking English. A year later, the second daughter was exiled to a camp in Siberia, and the youngest son was imprisoned in the Butyrskaya Prison in Moscow. My poor brother could not bear the grief and fell fatally ill. Before his death, he managed to arrange for his son to be brought from prison, at his request, to bid farewell to his father in the hospital. Everyone around was crying when this very young, innocent boy (which was clear to many) was brought into the room accompanied by two GPU soldiers with rifles. They were given five minutes. Sensing death, the father asked to extend the meeting even for a minute, but they had to forcefully separate the son who clung to him. They took him out only to the door, and the brother passed away. My second brother died in exile in Arkhangelsk. The third brother, Pyotr, whom I wrote about, spent almost the first twenty years of the revolution in exile, and in 1934, he disappeared after a trial, which I will write about later, without a trace. My younger sister had been in exile for 12 years by the time the war was declared, when I parted ways with Moscow, and nothing was known about her. Two of my uncles and three of my husband's brothers died in prison. As I mentioned, in 1937, my two sons disappeared without a trace, about which I will write more details later. I met two very religious, and I would say, according to common opinion, righteous old husband and wife. In the tsarist era, he held a very high position in the Irkutsk region in Siberia. I do not mention their surname. They lost three sons in the White Army. He was repeatedly arrested and spent many years in extremely harsh prison conditions. They were, of course, impoverished to absolute destitution. It was not uncommon to see this tall man, with a white beard, the epitome of a true nobleman, walking through the market with a basket or sack, picking up discarded vegetables. In Khabarovsk, their last eldest son remained, who miraculously managed to survive until 1926.

The man who survived, but was also in charge of horse repairs; he was married, had a daughter, and could only provide a meager sum for his parents. Not being a communist or a thief, he had to exist on an extremely small income. He was very

saddened by the dire situation of his parents. He managed to arrange a business trip and free transportation to buy horses, I don't remember where, but he was able to snatch two days to visit his father and mother. I met him. He led a good, honest life and was as devout as they were. Very attractive and handsome, around thirty years old. He showed me several portraits of the Tsar, the Tsarina, and the grand dukes, all with their own signatures and heartfelt words. He also showed his portrait in a ceremonial hussar uniform. I did not approve of this; it was an unnecessary carelessness to carry these portraits with him, which I expressed to him. He replied, "My Tsar will be with me until death." He stayed for three days and then left. There were no letters for several months, and finally, a sad message arrived from his widow. On his way back, he was arrested by the GPU, the portraits were confiscated, and he was shot without trial. The elderly parents were left completely helpless and destitute, despite being prominent landowners in the Kharkov province. I had to see them three years after I left for Moscow. I was sent to them with a task by an elder belonging to the catacomb church, led by Metropolitan Joseph. They were prayerful people, patiently bearing the cross sent to them by God. In 1930, my daughter, Irina, about whom I wrote that she could never fully recover after 1918, fell ill with severe liver pain. Local doctors deemed surgery necessary, but there were no surgical specialists there, so we decided to move to Moscow. I felt an insurmountable soul-wrenching melancholy, weighed down by a heavy foreboding of misfortune. And soon, two weeks before her death, I lost my son, which marked the beginning of not small previous sorrows and difficulties, but great sorrows and grief sent my way. We moved. Finding an apartment was immeasurably difficult. For a couple of weeks, we all lived with the suffering Irina in a room at my husband's brother's place, where he lived. If we had known that the promised room did not exist, we would have stayed in Yeisk, but we had already come, so there was nothing to do. Finally, we found a 6 by 6 arshin room and moved there with seven people: my son-in-law, the ailing Irina, Natasha, Petia, Andriusha, I, and my granddaughter Ninochka. We slept on mats, one on top of the other. After a month, Irina was admitted to the hospital. Despite the doctors' insistence on immediate liver surgery, the Soviet professor and communist Burdenko did not allow her to be admitted, claiming she had peritoneal tuberculosis and did not need an operation. When it became inevitable, it was too late. They opened the stomach area, made a five-inch wound. The stomach turned out to be healthy. During this time, a massive abscess had developed in the liver, and due to the amount of pus, the wound could not be closed. Whether the deliberate delay in contradicting the opinions of other doctors was unknown. Among all the ways the Bolsheviks used to destroy the noble class, there were such cases. Ten days later, I bid her farewell forever. I spent all that time by her side, day and night, sitting on chairs beside her, as the care was dreadful, and I did not trust anyone. I was allowed to do so. Until the last minute, despite her terrible suffering, I did not lose hope of her recovery. With her gentleness and incredible patience, she amazed everyone. Deeply religious, fully aware of her death,

she passed away while praying continuously. Once a week, I would drive and bring Ninochka to her, whom she adored, but even at the last parting with the six-year-old child, she did not despair, and only large tears of silent sorrow conveyed her emotional state. She said to me, "Mommy, I give her to you, she is now yours. I know that I am dying." The day before her death, she told me, "Here I am still living and lying here, but another me, light as air, is already standing next to my body." Two weeks before her death, I received a mourning letter from France, fortunately, not in her presence. I was informed of my son Nikolai's unexpected death in Nice due to an accident. This horrible news struck me like lightning; I will not write about it. I only realized one thing: I had to shield Irina from this news; it would have killed her prematurely. They had been inseparable friends since childhood. Yes, the Lord does not send a cross greater than one can bear, and I found them to help me pull myself together. I couldn't shed a tear for three hours; my words would have frightened her. I excused myself with a task that kept me.

A few days later, she asked me: "Why do your eyes fill with tears when I talk about Kolya?" I replied that I had been informed of his illness, and she said, "Don't cry, mommy, the main thing is that he is in better conditions than here in this Soviet hospital." On February 19, 1931, she passed away. I was allowed to take her from the morgue and bury her. After the deaths of my two dear adult children, all the hardships of life mentioned earlier became so pale and insignificant.

During Irina's illness, my younger daughter Natasha got married. I was left with Petia, Andryusha, and Ninochka. Soon, even Petia got married. The funds were very limited, barely enough for the most modest subsistence. I made flowers little by little, and with the fear of being arrested for not having a tax certificate, I sold them from hand to hand. Andryusha became an intern in a biological laboratory under Professor Priyashnikov from the Agricultural Academy. He started receiving a small salary.

30. Animal Fear

I step back to 1927 when we still lived in Yeisk. In that year, a significant event took place in the Russian Orthodox Church that fundamentally changed our lives. We stopped going to church.

The famous historical decree of Metropolitan Sergius was issued, leading to the division of believers. As is known, he called on the Russian people to recognize the Soviet power, "to rejoice in its joys and share its sorrows." He established the commemoration of the authorities during the liturgy. It was a political maneuver of satanic servants. Metropolitan Sergius entered into contact with the GPU.

When the decree reached Yeisk, I immediately sensed the cunning of Satan in it and said, "Andryusha, we will only go to our church if Father Vasily does not recognize the commemoration." I was sure that this venerable and devout priest, despite rumors of cruel persecutions of those who did not comply, would not waver for a moment. I faced criticism, arguments, and divisions, all trying to prove that the Church always remains the Church, clothed in grace. I felt this question very acutely and decided to travel to Moscow, where I hoped to find individuals whose authority I could rely on. But even then, only if their opinion coincided with mine. I firmly told myself, "I will not set foot in that church where they pray for a peaceful life with the devil." I arrived in Moscow and was delighted to find my brother there, just released after his second exile. He lived not in Moscow but in a dacha in the outskirts because he was not allowed to live in the capitals. On that day, he had secretly traveled to Moscow by chance. I had sisters there, who also attacked me and were ready to disown me for my opinion. Later, I understood that it was all the same animal fear and self-preservation instinct because those who recognized the commemoration were not persecuted. My brother was pleased with me; we shared the same thoughts. He told me, "Go to the former Monastery of the Exaltation of the Cross; there is a remarkable, relatively young priest, Father Alexander, in whom you can fully trust." My poor brother, or rather, highly fortunate, was persecuted for faith throughout the 30 years of the revolution (until my departure from Russia). After five years of exile, he was allowed to settle only outside the capitals. He did not attend the church in his settlement. While Father Alexander was still alive and serving, he occasionally had the opportunity to attend services. When there was no longer a single church in Moscow where the authorities were not commemorated, he stopped going to church altogether. He was summoned by the GPU: "Why don't you go to church?" (They knew he was the last to perform the duties of the prosecutor of the Holy Synod under the Tsar and understood that if he did not attend church, it was due to non-recognition). "I prefer to pray at home," he replied. "We know why you don't go; you don't recognize our metropolitan." "I don't

understand how you can have a metropolitan when you persecute faith and the church!" "You understand perfectly well that we are talking about Metropolitan Sergius." "In that case, I do not recognize him." They did not allow him to go home and sent him to a new exile for further suffering. After 1937, nothing was heard about him. From Kazakhstan, where he was located, he was sent somewhere unknown for ten years without the right to correspondence. Firm in faith and unwaveringly courageous was my brother. The last trial over him was in 1937, with open doors. People who saw this prematurely aged, beautiful not only in face but in spirit and dignity man, with whom he spoke, said they wanted to bow down to him. He did not defend himself but steadfastly endured torture for Christ.

So, following his advice, I went to the church of the former Monastery of the Exaltation of the Cross. I attended the liturgy. The appearance of the future martyr-priest and the entire service deeply impressed me. It had been a long time, and I do not remember where, since I had been spiritually uplifted in such a way. And it could not have been otherwise. It was felt that all the worshippers were experiencing the same. In the church, there was a reverent silence, with no walking around or even whispering allowed. There was no clinking of dishes, which usually distracts from prayer. At the door, there was a bowl for all the needs of the church. The choir sang, made up of parishioners who had not yet been arrested. After the service, I asked Father Alexander when I could speak with him. He replied, "I will finish the service, and you sit in the left side chapel; I will come to you, and we will talk." "Are you visiting?" he asked. I answered, "Yes, from afar, from the Caucasus." He uncovered himself and approached me in a black cassock with a belt, like novices, although he was not a monk. I noticed that people like him had faces illuminated by some special unearthly beauty. He sat next to me. I told him about my concerns regarding Metropolitan Sergius's decree, saying that I had decided not to attend myself and not allow Andryusha to serve in a church where prayers were said for the Soviet authorities. He was very pleased and blessed me, saying, "Sergius is a servant of the father of lies; you have judged this matter correctly, and never, under any circumstances, attend services where there is commemoration, and do not associate with such clergy, even if it means dying without repentance and requiem." His words flowed into my soul like a pure stream of water. They became a source of great earthly sorrows but a life-giving source for the soul. Now, 20 years have passed since that conversation, and I have not wavered in my steadfast views and his instructions.

In the evening, I confessed to him. I did not consider my boundless love for my children and the fear of losing them to be displeasing to God, and I did not mention anything about it to him when he suddenly said, "You cannot love children in this way. Remember the words spoken by St. Simeon to the Mother of God that a sword will pierce her soul. So, these words were also spoken to all mothers by the Mother of God; a sword will pierce your soul through your children." At that time, I did not think that he was endowed with foresight, but now, after 20 years, being the only one left in the world from seven children, I remember his words. Yes, I loved them too much. I will continue writing about the fate of the church and Father Alexander.

The next day, I left for Yeisk. I immediately went to Father Vasily. As I entered, I saw Father Vasily, with his hands behind his back, nervously pacing back and forth in the room, while the mother was crying bitterly. I thought something terrible had happened to them and asked what was going on. The mother answered almost in tears, "Imagine, Father Vasily signed a confession of commemoration at the GPU and all the requirements, even committing to report everything he learned during confessions." I could not believe my ears. "Father Vasily, is this true? Could you have done this?" With deep emotion in his fallen face, he replied, "I did not have the courage to be a martyr."

Unfortunate, yes, terribly unfortunate, and there were many like him. When I returned home, I told the children, "We will not go to church anymore." In Yeisk, there were three churches, and all the priests had signed their loyalty to Metropolitan Sergius. Until 1930, we were deprived of church service.

Upon arriving in Moscow, I first inquired if there were still churches that adhered to the decrees of St. Patriarch Tikhon and did not pray for those anathematized by him. There were two such churches: St. Nicholas the Great Cross on Ilyinka, where Andryusha immediately began to serve, and where the Lord led to the repose of my Irina, and the Serbian outpost on Solyanka. The former Monastery of the Exaltation of the Cross was closed, Father Alexander was arrested and sent to the Far North, to the so-called "Bear Mountain," where he was tortured to death.

I was told the following about him: he worked in timber extraction, and all the exiles treated him with reverence; even the overseers did not dare raise their voices against him. Of course, the GPU leadership did not like this, and instead of executing him, they tortured him, doing something to his head. The day before his death, his wife, who had come from Moscow, was allowed to visit him. He was healthy and in good spirits; he asked her to pass on his request to all the parishioners who had not yet been exiled, to firmly adhere to his instructions never to associate with the Sergianist priests. The next morning, the prison authorities announced that he had hanged himself. What a terrible Satanic lie! The GPU often used this tactic to discredit people living righteous lives and respected by believers. No one, of course, believed their malicious lie, especially his wife, who recounted the story. They showed her his dead body. His head was severely swollen. The GPU spread a rumor that he had secretly served a meal on a stump in the woods during a holiday, and many had seen fire enter the chalice. In terms of time and place, it could only have been him, and the GPU destroyed him...

31. Holy Martyr Father Vladimir

I had a close childhood friend, N.B. She was slightly older than me and got married two years before me. In the very first year of her marriage, she gave birth to a son, Vladimir. From birth, the boy captivated everyone with his large black, almost melancholic eyes and extraordinarily gentle character.

Two years later, she had another son, Boris, who also amazed everyone from the first day but with extreme restlessness and liveliness. I loved taking care of and playing with both of these boys. Vladimir grew up just as he was born. From his earliest years, he never wanted to play with other children. He would quietly sit in a corner, and sometimes it seemed strange, what thoughts were going through that little head? Both his father and mother, both believers and religious, were very concerned about him. One thing he loved was going to church. When it was time to send him to gymnasium, his mother told me, "I don't know how Vova can study; I think he's completely incapable and somewhat abnormal: nothing interests him, he's always silent and seems to be thinking about something beyond his years..." He excelled in all classes! His parents began to understand his religiosity, but when after graduating from gymnasium, he expressed his desire to continue his education at the theological academy, they were astonished. They did not fully grasp his aspiration for a spiritual path and insisted that he first complete university and then, if his intention remained unchanged, they would bless him to enter the theological academy. "You are still very young," they said, "listen to your parents." He fulfilled their wish and completed the course in legal studies at Moscow University in three years, which was allowed at the time. Upon graduation, he entered the theological academy, was ordained a deacon, and then a priest in 1917. He chose not to marry, but according to the church's canons, he had no right to remain unmarried. His family was close to another devout family, where a young daughter was dying of consumption. The doctors had given her no more than a month to live. She knew young Vladimir and knew she was dying. She did a great deed: she agreed to be betrothed to him so that he, becoming a widower, would have the right to priesthood. She was so weak that from her side, it was a holy sacrifice. Upon returning home from the church, she never rose again and passed away two weeks later.

Vladimir embarked on the path he had longed for and was chosen by God from birth. From the very beginning, he earned the respect and love of the parish. In 1924, he and his parents were sent to "voluntary," so-called, exile in the city of Tver. They were not allowed to leave the city and had to be under the watch of the GPU at all times. He was allowed to serve. His sermons were distinguished by complete fearlessness from the start, and when Sergius issued the decree, he called on believers not to obey it.

According to those who heard him, his preaching was extraordinarily powerful. One day he came to bid farewell to his parents, as someone had warned him that he would be arrested that night. He requested them under no circumstances, even at the moment of death, to invite a priest who had been in contact with the GPU. That same night, he was arrested and shot in Moscow (in 1930).

His brother Boris, when the revolution began, succumbed to propaganda, joined the Komsomol, and then, to the great grief of his parents, became a member of the League of Militant Atheists. Father Vladimir tried during his lifetime to bring him back to God, pleaded with him to reconsider, and probably prayed a lot for his brother's soul, but he did not waver. After Father Vladimir's murder in 1928, Boris became the chairman of the League of Militant Atheists in the city of Petropavlovsk in Kazakhstan, where he moved, marrying a Komsomol girl, also an atheist.

I know that his parents, as well as his fiancée, told them that if they did not have a church wedding, they would disown them. Despite extreme differences in views and life goals, Boris loved his father and mother. They and the bride decided to fulfill their parents' demands, mocking the sacrament, they secretly got married. Secretly because otherwise they would have been shot. I did not know anything more about them as I did not live in Moscow.

In 1935, I was in Moscow for a few days, where I met Boris. He joyfully approached me, saying, "By the prayers of Father Vladimir, the Lord in heaven has brought me back to Him."

Here is what he told me:

"When we got married, my fiancée's mother blessed her with an icon of the 'Not-Made-by-Hands Savior' and said, 'Just give me your word that you will not abandon Him, even if He is not needed right now, just don't abandon Him.' He truly was not needed by us and lay in the shed, in a trunk with unnecessary junk. A year later, a boy was born to us. We both wanted a child very much and were very happy about his birth, but the child was born sick and weak, with tuberculosis of the spine. We managed to save some money and spared no expense on doctors, and I earned enough. They all said that at best, with good care and always lying in a plaster corset, the boy could live to be six years old. So we went to Kazakhstan, hoping for a better climate, and there I was the chairman of the League of Militant Atheists, and we persecuted the church. The child was five years old, his health deteriorating. We heard that a famous professor of childhood diseases was exiled to Petropavlovsk. It was a 25-verst ride on horses from our settlement to the nearest station. There was only one train to Petropavlovsk per day. The child was very ill, and I decided to go and invite the professor to us. As I approached the station, I saw the train leaving

before my eyes. I was a few minutes late. What was I to do: stay and wait for a day, leaving my wife alone, and what if the child died without me? I thought and turned back. When I arrived, I found the following: the mother, crying, was kneeling by the crib, embracing the already cooling legs of the child."

The local paramedic had just left, saying that these were the child's last moments. I sat down at the table opposite the window, took my head in my hands, and surrendered to despair. And suddenly, as if in a vision, I saw the doors of the shed open, and out stepped my deceased brother, Father Vladimir. He was holding our Savior's icon, facing away from me. I was stunned, watching him walk, his long, russet hair waving in the wind, hearing his footsteps as he opened the entrance door. I was petrified and felt cold as marble. He entered the room, approached me, silently handed me the icon, and then disappeared like a vision. I cannot put into words what I experienced, but I rushed to the shed, found the icon in the trunk, and placed it on the child. The next morning, he was completely healthy! The doctors who had treated him were at a loss. They removed the cast. There were no signs of tuberculosis. At that moment, I understood everything, I understood that there is a God, I understood my brother's prayers! I immediately declared my departure from the League of Militant Atheists and did not hide the miracle that happened to me. Everywhere and to everyone, I proclaim what happened to me and call for faith in God. Without delay, we left for the area near Moscow where my parents settled after the end of their exile. We baptized our son, giving him the name Georgy." I said goodbye to Boris and never saw him again. When I arrived in Moscow in 1937, I learned that after the baptism, he, his wife, and child had moved to Kislovodsk in the Caucasus. Boris openly spoke about his error and salvation. A year later, while completely healthy, he unexpectedly passed away, and doctors could not determine the cause. The Bolsheviks removed him.

32. Holy Martyr Father Valentin

In the Church of St. Nicholas the Great Cross, there was a very old priest known for his unwavering resistance against the Bolsheviks and his open opposition to Metropolitan Sergius and his decree, Father Valentin Svetsitsky. The church was so full during his service that people stood not only on the stairs but also in the courtyard. The Bolsheviks would have surely tormented him in exile if he had not fallen ill and died a natural death.

His fame spread far and wide, and the Bolshevik authorities, where the end justifies the means, needed to discredit him with their usual lies before the believers. He was dying unconscious, and they published a letter in all newspapers, allegedly written by him before his death, where he addresses all parishioners, asking them to follow him. Supposedly, he repents of his error in understanding it in his final moments. The letter asks them to follow Metropolitan Sergius and recognize the decree and commemoration. The letter had a forged signature. The Bolsheviks arranged grand funerals for him. Many of the parishioners were misled and switched to Sergianist churches, but those gifted with intelligence understood the new devilish cunning in the forged signature. It was a terrible, unimaginable time. Those who refused commemoration and did not agree to sign the demands related to the decree were immediately arrested and shot without restraint in numbers. As rumored at the time, up to 10,000 people were shot in Moscow within a month, starting from metropolitans and ending with psalmists, while civilians across Russia were executed by the thousands, imprisoned, and exiled to the horrific conditions of the Northern and Siberian labor camps. Lubyanka in Moscow became a place of mass martyrdom. Passersby tried to avoid passing near the GPU's house of death because there was an unbearable stench of corpses; the bodies were taken away at night, as discreetly as possible, but they couldn't keep up with the removal.

Not all the clergy who refused were immediately arrested. Some known for their steadfastness were left at their churches, despite their sermons urging disobedience. This was a political strategy. They were monitored and noted everyone who attended these churches! Over time, these people were gradually arrested or simply disappeared, just like the priests accused under Article 58.10 as counter-revolutionaries. Initially, the clergy who recognized Sergius were left in place, but once the first wave of arrests and executions subsided, they began selecting from among them those who, in the eyes of the satanic power, showed faith in God but had submitted out of cowardice or thoughtlessness. Ultimately, at the core of all persecutions, there was the struggle of the servants of the Antichrist against faith in God, and the accusation of counter-revolution justified these persecutions: Metropolitan Sergius's persona was subservient to the authorities.

Many asked each other, "Is Metropolitan Sergius taking part in the persecutions and destruction of churches?" Some did not believe he actively participated in these acts, but unfortunately, he did. I can provide a personally known example confirming his actual involvement in these affairs.

In the Church of St. Nicholas the Great Cross, a young girl sang in the choir, very modest and attractive. Her whole family was religious and therefore did not recognize the Sergianist church. We met, and I often visited their country house near Moscow with Andrey. Veronika worked at the main post office in Moscow, she was friendly and pleasant. A high-ranking GPU officer who came to her department for official business became enamored with her, struck up conversations with her, and, to the horror of her and her family, asked for their address. Scaring everyone, he unexpectedly visited their dacha. The intentions of these terrible people were always unpredictable. After exchanging pleasantries, he took out a box of pastries, which at that time were unattainable for the common people, and handed it to Veronika, asking her to accept him as a guest. He started coming often and courting her. Perhaps everyone secretly crossed themselves under their clothes, asking to be rid of such a guest, but there was nothing to be done. One time he caught me and Andrey at their place. He appeared to be around 30 and of quite an interesting appearance. Almost immediately, they went for a walk, except for Veronika's father and mother, and Andrey and I hurried to retreat. Veronika said that he might have appealed to her, but the thought that he was not only a department head in the GPU but, as he himself said, in charge of church affairs, repelled her and filled her with horror. He proposed to her. She declined. "How can I be your wife when you are not only a nonbeliever but a persecutor of the Church, and for no reason can I agree to that." During their conversations, he tried in every way to turn her away from her faith in God, but she remained steadfast, especially since she was one of the beloved spiritual daughters of the martyred Father Alexander. He persisted, threatening to shoot her and himself, and even once pulled out a revolver and aimed it at her. He continued to visit. The family's situation was terrible. Neither sleep nor food came to mind. Only one conversation could end it all, with either revenge or peace. Veronika was in turmoil, trying to break free from the hawk's talons. Once, during her work at the post office, she was summoned and handed a summons to immediately appear at the GPU on Lubyanka in a particular office... It turned out to be his office. He instructed her to pick up the telephone and, taking the other receiver, called Metropolitan Sergius. "Listen to the conversation," he told her. The conversation was about the destruction of one of the churches in Moscow, with Sergius not only failing to protest but actively participating in this horrific act, giving his consent. "Did you hear that?" the officer said. "This is the clergy you worship." She replied that this conversation could not shake her faith in God, and she had never recognized Metropolitan Sergius, but now she was convinced that she was right about him. The officer told her, "My mother was a believer, and I prayed until

adulthood, but one incident, which I won't discuss, influenced me so much that it led me to atheism."

In the heart of this man, there still remained compassion somewhere deep down, but, of course, not for everyone, but for Veronika, whom he genuinely seemed to love. He left her. A year passed, and she was not arrested; I do not know her further fate for sure. As they said, she married someone else. Another incident that characterizes Metropolitan Sergius, I can mention as I personally heard it from an eyewitness. My elder daughter's friend was Masha R. She was the daughter of a poor store clerk. Her parents were indifferent to religion. Masha lived with us for a long time in the countryside, and we often spoke with her. She spoke as millions of confused students do, saying, "I am not a believer, but I know there is something higher, and whether it is God, I do not know." This Masha told me with indignation the following story. At that time, there was a housing shortage, and she had to go to the housing department to arrange her room. "I am sitting in the waiting area, waiting for my turn. In comes a monk, already old, and plump. I didn't understand much, but I realized he was not an ordinary monk, someone higher. He obsequiously and humbly addressed the young Komsomol members, calling them comrades. I felt ashamed for him. (Masha was not a Komsomol member and despised them). One of them said, 'I'll make a phone call.' 'Let me talk myself, why bother, comrade?' He wanted to pick up the receiver, but the other didn't allow it. He called someone and said, 'You know, it somehow feels uncomfortable; what will people say? Metropolitan Sergius is on the line, the deputy patriarch, could we rearrange things so that we don't crowd his rooms and not move tenants in?' The response was favorable, and Metropolitan Sergius left with bows. Although I am not interested in church affairs, I felt ashamed for him," Masha said. After the deceased Father Valentin, there were two more priests in the Church of St. Nicholas the Great Cross, but they somehow secretly disappeared. Father Mikhail L. came to offer his priesthood. He said a few words, bribing the parishioners, and the majority asked him to be their priest. He served for two years, managed to win over many. By the way, my Andrey, as they say, didn't suspect anything in him. He didn't like that he wore civilian clothes outside of service, his hair was cut neatly, he had a handsome appearance, knew the services without errors, so he was not an impostor in priestly robes, but his attire still puzzled some. Some experienced people warned not to trust him and be cautious. In early 1932, the church was closed. Father Mikhail was seen on the street in a GPU military uniform. He turned out to be a provocateur and betrayed all the parishioners. For a while, no one was arrested, and everyone moved to the Serbian compound on Solyanka. Andrey also served there. During the first week of Lent, I was a little late and rushed. Andrey left earlier. There was severe ice. Getting off the tram, I hurried and fell near the Ilyinsky Gates. I felt a sharp pain in my left side and couldn't make it to the church, so I went back home. The temperature rose immediately, reaching 40° by the morning. The doctor diagnosed

a fractured left rib and pleurisy due to the injury. I was greatly worried that my 8-year-old granddaughter and Andrey, still a child despite being 17, would be left alone without me. Andrey's service was near the hospital, and he would sometimes stop by three times a day to ask about my health. This boy was loved everywhere and by everyone. The nurse on duty and the female doctor told me how at midnight, Andrey would rush in: "Show me my mom, even if it's just through the door."

"Andrey, you can't do this at night, what have you come up with?" And he pleaded so endearingly that I couldn't refuse. "What am I going to do with you, you'll get into trouble because of you!" And yet, he pulled back the curtain at the door to the room, ensuring that I was alive, and left joyfully. I was seriously ill for a long time. By the fifth week, I started to recover, and by the sixth, I began to get up little by little. On Palm Sunday, my son Pyotr and his wife, along with Andrey, were sitting with me. The doctor approached and said, "Well, Andrey, I have good news for you, take your mom home tomorrow, she can continue her recovery at home now." Pyotr really wanted to come for me himself as the eldest, but he had serious work, so it was decided that Andrey would come exactly at 6 p.m. the next day by taxi. All three of them left in high spirits. That night, I had a dream. I was lying in an empty room with only a bed and nothing else. I was dressed and seemed to be waiting for someone. At midnight, there was a light knock on the window. I saw my deceased son Kolya and my brother Vladimir, who was killed in the Carpathians in 1915. Kolya said, "Ivan is with us, Mom, it's time!" As it happens in dreams, I instantly found myself alone in some extraordinary place. To my right, facing me, was a wonderful painting of mountains in colors unseen on Earth (upon waking up, of course, I couldn't remember them), but in the dream, I was enchanted and said, "What is this? Such colors do not exist on Earth!" To my left, there was an infinite number of white trees reaching toward the sky, standing in calm, mirror-like water. Between the trees were an endless number of white glowing boats of all sizes, starting from tiny ones. Each boat also had a person glowing entirely in white. Directly in front of me, in the distance, was a dreadful, raging, completely black sea. I found myself in a boat and saw that to my left was my late mother, and to my right was my daughter Irina. Before I could grasp the joy of the reunion, I felt my boat rocking. I said, "Mom, my boat is rocking!" And she replied, "This cannot be, whoever is here is at eternal rest!" At that moment, my boat seemed to break free from its anchor and drift into the terrifying sea. I heard my mother saying, "So, it's not your time yet!" At that moment, I woke up with an incredibly heavy feeling that I was entering some terrible life storms, and it was clear to me that something was amiss with Andrey, and I wouldn't see him.

33. Young Martyr Andrey

The dream turned out to be prophetic. I started crying, and the concerned nurse who approached me thought I was in pain, trying to calm me down. But all I kept saying was, "Misfortune with Andrey!" And indeed, misfortune struck, but I never imagined it would be like this, especially since he was still so young. I called the doctor's sister; she gave me some drops, asking me to calm down, saying it was a product of weak body fantasy. But I felt I was not mistaken. This continued throughout the day. I could barely stand; I was standing with my sister by the window, which overlooked the alley where cars entered the hospital gates. At exactly 6 p.m., a taxi appeared. My sister said, "There comes Andrey for you, and here you were just imagining things and getting anxious." From the taxi emerged Pyotr and his young wife, even though he had said he couldn't leave work at that hour. I nearly collapsed. They entered, trying not to show their anxiety: "Where is Andrey, what has happened to him?" Pyotr said, "Don't worry, Mom, everything will probably turn out fine, but Andrey was arrested and taken away tonight." I needed to find out in which prison he was held. I didn't have the strength to go and inquire by myself, but I received help. He was in Butyrskaya Prison. On Maundy Thursday, a kind woman took me to the prison, holding my arm. I was allowed to send him clothes and food weekly. On Saturday, I brought him Easter bread and cake, but, of course, not in the form of Easter bread and cake, just bread and sweet cottage cheese in a cup. Colored eggs were not allowed; we had to cut hard-boiled eggs in half and peel them. The transfers required a list of items being passed, and between the lines, I congratulated him on the Resurrection of Christ. What joy it was when they brought me back a note with his receipt signature, where he also congratulated me and wrote that he was well and sent kisses. It was God's grace. The overseer who handed it over either didn't read it or took pity on us and let it pass. For the next three months that he spent in prison, we exchanged a few words each time. Most of them were heavily crossed out with ink, but three times it went smoothly. On the third month, an unknown elderly man came to me. He had just been released from prison, where he had shared a cell with Andrey for his faith, and now he was going to voluntary exile in Kazakhstan (former Kyrgyzstan near the Altai Mountains, with the capital Alma-Ata, formerly known as Verny). How overjoyed I was, you can imagine.

He told me that the whole cell, which held 300 people, loved Andrey and called him their Guardian Angel. Where someone felt down and despondent, Andrey was there; where quarrels escalated and could lead to fights, Andrey was present and would

invariably either cheer up the despondent or pacify those in conflict. "Apart from love, we all also have great respect for this almost child," Mr. G told me.

The horror that grips one when summoned for interrogation by the investigator can only be imagined by those who have experienced it. Usually, several people conduct the interrogation. Bishops couldn't handle it and would faint upon seeing the situation, even before the questioning began.

Andrey was called in. He returned to the cell with a crushed face and tears. Everyone surrounded him, asking questions - he didn't respond. For three days, he refused to eat or drink. Finally, he said, "I deceived God! When I was filling out the protocol of testimony, and was accused of literally everything I said in confession to Father Mikhail, I understood everything. When I had to answer the question: 'How do you feel about commemorating the authorities?' I got scared and wrote, 'I feel indifferent.' Poor boy!" said the visitor. "What a pure soul."

When he was called for a second interrogation to cross-reference his statements, he turned to the investigator and said, "Before you conduct my second interrogation, please provide me with the protocol of the first interrogation." "Why do you need it?" the investigator asked in surprise. "I want to amend one statement there."

"That's interesting," said the investigator. They gave him the protocol, and he took the pen from the table, crossed out the word 'indifferently,' and wrote, 'I feel negatively.' After that, we lived together in Alma-Ata and became great friends.

When I had to wait in the prison reception area for my turn to pass items, I met many others who were grieving for their incarcerated loved ones. An elderly, very polite gentleman came in. His two elderly sisters were also detained. And for what? During a search, they found a handwritten piece of the Akathist Hymn to St. John the Warrior, with the final joy "Rejoice, John the Warrior." They read it and said, "Ah! You rejoice in war." Without further explanation, they arrested and imprisoned them. They spent three months there until they could prove that it was a prayer and that 'John the Warrior' was the name of a Saint. That was the reason these people suffered and agonized. Some of the visitors at the prison had children as young as 10-12 years old who were sent to Siberian camps alongside adults for saying something against the authorities at school. Many of these children were left orphaned or lost their parents.

After three months, I was allowed a meeting with Andrey through the bars, in the presence of a GPU guard. This meant that he would soon be expelled. The list would be posted for one day, allowing items to be sent, possibly even money. Every morning, I took my granddaughter Ninochka with me to check the list. I wanted to accompany him if he was being sent free rather than in stages. My soul was torn: to take Ninochka into the unknown - I was afraid; to let Andrey go alone - I couldn't bear it. I decided to take my precious orphan to the family of the executed Father Vladimir, who I mentioned earlier, as his parents were my dearest friends in the world. I thought I would come back later and take her when things settled. I needed to go to Moscow to seek their consent. I went to the prosecutor, inquiring about my

son's case, explaining that I needed to leave for a day and feared missing his departure. He rummaged through the papers and said, "The investigation won't be completed in less than two weeks." I left but was still very anxious. The next morning, I went with Ninochka as usual. I forgot my glasses; she could already read. I lifted her, and suddenly she said fearfully, "Grandma! Andrey was sent off yesterday." My grief was unimaginable. Later, I found out that a whole transport had left, and everyone was bidding farewell and providing essentials. My poor Andrey waited until the last minute before the train's departure and was tormented that I wasn't there. So, they took him away without a penny, without food, without clothes. I immediately went to the prosecutor. Clearly, it was deliberate mockery and the triumph of the satanic glee of this person, worse than any serpent or animal. When I asked why he had said the investigation would last no less than two weeks, he replied, "Mistakes are always possible." There I learned that Andrey was sent in stages to Alma-Ata, Kazakhstan. When I asked how long they would travel, they told me, "The train is in transit and will arrive in five days." Again, a lie. On the same day, with great sorrow, I parted with my granddaughter, whose father had been exiled for two years on charges related to some incorrect report, and took her to my friends. Arriving in Alma-Ata, I had no idea what to do, where to find accommodation, or if I would even find a room. I had a letter to an agronomist who had been sent there, but the person who gave me the letter didn't know the address. I spotted a respectable-looking man among the passengers and for some reason immediately thought he was a professor. It turned out he was. I asked him if he happened to know the agronomist I had a letter for. He was a close friend of his but was currently away on a business trip.

The professor - an exile, had a wife and two teenage children, and only one room, so he couldn't invite me to stay overnight even for one night. However, he decided to take me to their place to rest from the long journey and figure something out, although he doubted that we could even find a corner since everything was overcrowded with exiles. His wife warmly welcomed me and regretted not having space. In the yard, there was a small shed filled with firewood and junk. They brought out a camp bed for me in the yard on the first night and then decided to clear out the shed for me to stay there. It was very hot, and I wasn't afraid of catching a cold, but it was terrifying when everyone locked up for the night against Kyrgyz looters, and I was alone in the shed in a completely unfamiliar city. That's how I lived until the 26th of August, going to the station twice daily, inquiring about transportation from Moscow.

On the 26th of August, I was at the platform when a GPU officer approached me, "Citizen, what are you always doing here at the station, who are you waiting for?" I told him how they had taken my son, how he had left without anything, how I had sent telegrams to collection points along the way from Moscow to Alma-Ata, and not receiving a paid response, I feared he might have perished on the way. I cried

bitterly, and it seemed to me that I could see a trace of compassion on his face. "Go to the transfer prison and wait there; 300 people will arrive from Moscow today." With hope, I went and stood against the prison gate across the road, behind a low fence. Less than an hour passed when carriages arrived along the road with that officer. He shouted, "Your son has arrived." I recalled Dostoevsky's words about the onion he was offered, and I thought these words from him were the onion he gave me. I learned that my boy was alive, and I would see him. He added, "When we finish copying all of them, I will grant you a meeting." I had to wait for about two more hours when a cloud of dust and the sound of many footsteps appeared along the road from the station. The heat was unbearable. They were walking, flanked by GPU soldiers with guns pointed at them from both sides, like sheep: nuns, primarily, and among them laypeople. The transport consisted almost exclusively of exiles for religious reasons. I strained to keep an eye out in the crowd to not miss Andrey when I heard a joyful and surprised cry, "Mommy!"

Everyone involuntarily raised their lowered heads. He was the tallest, and I saw his radiant, dear face. They were led to a square where they were copied, and we could see each other the whole time. After the process, I was allowed in, and we were able to embrace each other. Both he and I forgot all sorrows and the situation. They led him behind the prison fence, and I, happy, returned to my shed. This was considered not imprisonment but an exile. According to the rules, the transfer prison was supposed to release him into the city for free residence and employment of his choice after a week. However, one thing is the decree; another is its execution. He spent three months in the prison, not behind bars in a cell but free to roam a large area as he pleased, within a stone fence. The same officer, in response to Andrey's daring question about why he wasn't released sooner, took it as insolence and began creating obstacles.

I was given a pass and permission to visit him and sit with him all day, which I did. At that time, I had the opportunity to buy groceries at the store. My son sent me a small sum of money from France. I could feed and even indulge Andrey, who was famished from the journey as they only provided a piece of rye bread and hot water. He was as thin as a rail. Almost everyone, except my poor boy, had provisions brought for them upon departure. He didn't have to travel with the clergy, who would have shared with him; instead, they placed him in a train carriage (the only one) with convicts. A former Cossack ensign sat on the same bench as him, constantly eating hearty foods and never offering him even a small piece; the supervisors stole bread and provided very little. The wagon was tightly sealed, the windows boarded up to prevent looking out, so it was almost dark. It was stuffy. They barely gave any water, and they traveled for a month and a half. The living conditions at the transfer point were terrible. Long thatched roofs over the ground where 300 men and women were crammed together. They were long trenches dug into the ground with a thatched roof overhead. People had to descend

a few steps into these trenches, and on both sides, on the ground, people lay with their clothes spread out. Light only entered through the open spaces on the market side. I tried to be near Andrey as much as possible. They provided bread and a terrible gruel instead of soup twice a day. They served the food in pots that the convicts used to wash their dirty socks and infested clothes after meals. I appealed to the GPU several times, asking to release him to me, as it was his right and many had already left, but they wouldn't let him go. Believers were treated the harshest. Finally, after a month and a half, they allowed me to take him for a day, ensuring he was back in time for the evening roll call. Sleeping was awful. The unfortunates were suffering so much that there were no means to fight this evil. Dressed in clean undergarments that I washed with cold water in the creek, he would be covered in them the next morning. An epidemic of dysentery broke out due to the unsanitary conditions, poor nutrition, and lack of food.

When I arrived in the mornings to check on Andrey, I found the bodies of those who had passed away, sometimes several at a time. I was incredibly fearful for him; it all began very soon after his arrival. It was excruciatingly painful to be unable to rescue him, innocent of any wrongdoing, from this nightmarish situation. It felt worse than slavery. One day, Andrey wasn't there to meet me when I arrived. My heart pounded with foreboding. I descended into the trench to find my boy lying in the heat, suffering from dysentery, on the ground, under a roof that made it hard to breathe, with the air being deadly. I ran to the doctor, a very kind and compassionate man, also an exile, who was no longer young. When I told him Andrey was sick, he gasped sympathetically and said, "Poor Andrey, a fine young man, I have feared for him all along. What do we do now? As you see, there is no room in the infirmary; they are lying on tables, under tables, and two to a bed. Here's what I'll do: we have an order that in case of overcrowding with patients, with the GPU's consent, we can transfer them to the city, to the Red Cross hospital."

He wrote a statement and said, "Go quickly to the GPU and ask for permission based on my note to take him there; it's quite nice there: doctors and nurses are all (except the supervisors) exiles." I went, they read it, and declared, "No exceptions for your son." Asking was like squeezing water from a stone. "I said no, and no means no."

Despite the grief, I went to the hospital, where a nun I knew was the secretary. I explained the situation to her. She crossed herself, sat down, and wrote: "By order of the GPU, admit the patient with dysentery to the ward." I was horrified and scared for her, but she calmly told me to go, hire a cart, bring the words of the Savior, that there is no greater love than to lay down one's life for their friends. I went, hired a horse, and brought Andrey. He spent two weeks there, and I spent the entire day either with him or in the hospital yard. The medical staff took care of him, and by God's grace, he recovered without any repercussions. During his stay at the Red Cross, a tragic event occurred at the transfer point, further confirming to me that what we grieve over, not knowing the ways of the Lord, often leads to good. One night, many carts arrived and took away all those who could still walk, up to 300

men and women. They needed to free up space for the newly arrived transport. They were sent by train to Tashkent for work, supposedly for three weeks. Of the group, only around 30 people returned! All had died of typhus or were already infected with dysentery. They were brought to Tashkent late at night, there was no room, so they were taken to abandoned Kyrgyz yurts. It was mid-November, with continuous rains and unusual morning frosts for the local climate. The water in the yurts froze to the bottom. People were forcibly crammed into them. They stood there as long as they could, then sat down or collapsed in exhaustion, falling into the water. By morning, everyone was frozen. They began dying immediately. Among them was an elderly princess, a kind and gentle soul. She had two months left before the end of her three-year sentence (for her noble title). She had been eagerly counting down the days until her release, only to meet her end in these horrific conditions. If she had any remaining relatives, they would never know. After Andrey recovered, they finally released him to me. It was the end of November. Around that time, an agronomist returned from his business trip, to whom I had a letter from Moscow, and he offered us his small kitchen to live in, spreading a coat on the floor for the night.

If not for the longing for my granddaughter, we would have been so happy together. The unusual cold, dropping to 10 degrees there, I could count the stars through the ruined roof of the shed. Water put in anything would freeze all the way to the bottom. If not for one kind Tatar woman, I wouldn't have endured. She lived in the same courtyard and was the wife of the police chief. I don't know if he knew, as the police were not the GPU, but she brought and sheltered me every evening, covering me in my winter-worn clothes, blankets, and a quilt from above.

Professor V..., who brought me to his place at the beginning, worked in agriculture. At that time, there was an agricultural exhibition, and he allowed Andrey to set up a vegetable pavilion. He did well with it and received a hundredweight watermelon and two jars of jam as a reward from the exhibition. The poverty in terms of food was not yet deadly at that time, but the half-starved Kyrgyz people would stop by the richly decorated pavilions with appetizers, fish departments, and sweets, etc., which were of course not available to the general population there but only for the communists.

I witnessed a scene that could have been amusing in an operetta but instead brought tears in this case. A commission of experts from Moscow was expected to arrive, and the newly appointed head of the region, a Kyrgyz communist, had to greet them. Hundreds of people were gathered. There was a music orchestra on stage, and in front of it, there was this head figure and the experts. Representatives from the pavilions with edible, tasty products took turns offering them on plates with forks for tasting, and with each new sample, as they filled their mouths, the orchestra played a fanfare, and the hungry onlookers were forced to shout "hurrah," I saw it myself.

One evening, our host, the agronomist, suggested that we read aloud Chekhov's "The Devil's Wheel." During the reading, which revealed the character of future Russian Bolshevism in its desire to break, shatter, and destroy all the old, the reader, who was very expressive and good, suddenly jumped up and quickly opened the front door. "I didn't know I still had listeners," he said. The GPU was standing outside the window, attaching some device to the wall. The next day, the agronomist was arrested and taken away.

34. The Teacher of Communism, Shetenev

I really liked the city for its uniqueness. Particularly, the Eastern bazaar attracted me. Caravans of loaded camels, beautiful Beijing, Bukhara, and local carpets, colorful felts for yurts, tents with canvas roofs where juicy lamb and a special kind of dough fried with spices were cooked on coals or a spit. Piles of splendid melons, watermelons, colossal loose tomatoes, apples by the kilo (from these apples, the city is called Almaty, meaning "father of apples"), special calls inviting people to their tents, sometimes in vibrant national costumes of traders of different nationalities; an extensive flea market where occasionally one could find ancient and interesting art pieces. All this vivid, colorful picture greatly attracted me, and I would often, almost daily, go there. It was in 1933!

The houses, due to frequent earthquakes, were all single-story. What gardens everyone had! Simply marvelous, like an earthly paradise. Apricots, peaches, grapes that could compete with the best fruits in the world. The so-called head arik—a canal paved with stones on the bottom and sides, carrying the purest mountain water. The streets were all straight, running vertically towards the mountains, and on both sides of them, cheerfully babbling streams flowed, the water of which was used for drinking; behind the streams were rows of towering poplars and birches that also reached high, narrow, long, almost rivaling the poplars in height. There was nothing more to wish for. That's how it was until the 23rd of December old style, when an order came from the GPU without any explanation of reasons for Andrey to leave the next day, on Christmas Eve, to settle in the town of Akhtubinsk. There was no room for discussion. We had heard before that it was a very unfriendly place, the population almost entirely, except for exiles, were uncultured Kyrgyz people. The agriculture management, where many exiled professors worked, gave him a letter to the local steam mill requesting employment. We went there with sadness; there was nothing to be done!

We arrived in Akhtubinsk at midnight on Christmas. We got off at the station and decided to wait until morning, as we knew no one or nothing. There was a meter and a half of snow, and the frost was severe. The GPU ordered us out. When we objected, saying that Andrey was an exile and we had no one here, the response was curt: "That's not our concern, leave." Then Andrey showed the letter from the management of the mill and asked to leave me sitting in the passage until he returned. He went to find the mill. There was no lighting in the city, only a distant strip of electric light visible. I was afraid. At night, alone, in an unfamiliar city where such semi-wild people lived, walked my poor son. But despite his young age, he was very resourceful and smart. He walked for a long time until he met a Kyrgyz who didn't speak Russian but understood the word "mill" and pointed towards it in the distance.

I waited for him for two hours. And here he arrives on a cart. He reached the mill and saw a light in one of the windows. He knocked... An intelligent man, who turned out to be the mill's accountant, also an exile, came out. He hadn't laid down because he hadn't submitted the annual report. Andrey showed him the letter from the management in Almaty and told him that his mother was being driven away from the station, and he had come to ask for permission to let her spend the night. He woke up the stableman, ordered the horse to be harnessed, and took me with him. My Andrey had a cheerful, contented face. They allowed us to sleep on tables in the office. It was warm, and we were glad to spend Christmas Eve like that. In the morning, the stableman offered us to stay with him due to the difficulty of finding a room and considering our financial means. He was already a 70-year-old man, and so was his wife. A clean little room in the basement was allocated to us. We were given a corner on the floor, and until we found another place, we slept on the floor in one corner, a piglet in another, and in the third, the hosts slept on two beds with blankets. Due to the lack of educated clerks, Andrey was taken to the laboratory the very next day, where he worked as an assistant laboratory assistant for six months. By a decree from Almaty, he was already a senior lab assistant after six months. Unfriendly, cold, and incredibly snowy Akhtubinsk did not become much more attractive in the spring, but under the warm sun, one could find warmth everywhere. It was very difficult without a church. There was one, but it was renewalist. This city was a city of political criminals in tsarist times. Initially, it was a small village, and it had only been developing for 50 years. A huge steam mill with 600 workers was organized right from the beginning. The region was barren, totally devoid of trees, let alone fruit trees, in contrast to the nature-rich city of Almaty, but there were vast fields of wheat and other grains. The gardens were good, especially the sweet and tasty tomatoes, which replaced fruits due to their absence. Almost everyone had one cow; if they had more, they would be labeled as "kulaks" first, and then sent to Siberia.

Interestingly, due to incredible thefts, when cattle were pulled out through the dismantled ceiling of the barn, cows were kept in the same room where people slept, albeit kept clean, cleaned multiple times a day, but the smell of a cowshed was everywhere. There were no flowers, except for tulips in the spring, and despite a portion of the population being Ukrainians, there was no desire to have a garden with mallows and sunflowers, as in Malorossiia. There were plenty of melons and watermelons. Outside the city, in the flat green banks, amidst willow bushes, flowed a transparent small river, so clear that one could see the sandy bottom. It seemed to me that this is what the Jordan River should be like, and I often, when I was home alone, sat there on the shore.

In the summer, temperatures rose to 50°C, and in winter, it dropped to -50°C. The dust was unimaginable. Almost everyone wore special goggles. It used to be a part of the now-distant Aral Sea. In the city, more than a quarter of an arshin was covered

in small seashells, which, crushed by horses and trucks, turned into dust and got into shoes, requiring them to be shaken out several times while walking.

At that time, we lived in a tiny room with an earthen floor, where there was a large wide bed, a very worn-out table occupying half the room, and two chairs. Once, I met a family from Moscow, hopelessly wandering in search of accommodation. He was a former chamberlain, and she had been involved in church activities, both exiled with their two sons, aged 17 and 15, for three years. I invited them to stay with us.

Whenever needed, the room would stretch like rubber. The husband and wife sat at the table, the sons under the table, and Andrey and I on the bed. It was cheerful; they were good people. We lived together for two months, cramped but not upset. Eventually, they found a two-room apartment, and a school teacher offered us to move into his house. They settled peacefully, all by themselves, and we ended up with an atheist, an active communist. I had never encountered such a beastly person before in my life. Firstly, he didn't want us to hang icons in our room: "I don't want any of this in my house." Since I naturally did not comply and hung an icon lamp, he called me terribly sacrilegious and grew to hate me.

He tormented not only us but also drove his father out of his own house, declaring it his own property entirely illegally (but for communists, their laws). He beat his elderly mother, who trembled and remained silent in front of him, and he hit his 17-year-old, foolish brother mercilessly on the head if he didn't complete his yard and housework, causing him to bleed from the ears numerous times, almost deafening him. He provided the mother and brother with the bare minimum, while he always prepared a substantial, rich lunch for himself, which he consumed in their presence, sitting with them at the same table. The poor old mother and brother confided in me about their fear and trembling in front of him when he left for school. I had to quietly cook something for us on a kerosene stove, as he didn't allow me to cook in their kitchen; he forbade me from frying anything to avoid any smells in the house. He made his old father a hired guard in the orchard, and living in a hut made of sticks in all kinds of weather in spring, summer, and fall, and in a cold cellar in winter, he fell ill. He evidently had a sick heart, his legs swelled incredibly, and they once brought him home in a cart. I witnessed it all; he groaned in pain. The son came out: "You lazy good-for-nothing, you don't want to work, huh? Your son will take care of you, and that's it! Right now, and don't let this happen again."

They took him back. Two days later, they brought him back again. The son-beast wasn't at home. The one who brought him and the naive brother nearly carried him onto the glass balcony, where the samovar was boiling on the table. "I feel like having a cup of tea," he said. His poor wife poured him a glass, looking around to see if her son would come, and he suddenly arrived, immediately becoming agitated and wanting to beat him, but the old man couldn't get up. They silently drank tea; the father didn't dare take sugar, while the son put several sugar cubes in his glass. I was in another corner, washing my dishes. The old man asked for help to get up and

wanted to go lie down in his room, but the son shouted, "What a trick you've come up with! Go to the basement, sleep, and tomorrow to work!" The old man said nothing, and they led him to the basement, where a cot was set up for him. The next morning at seven o'clock, his son went to wake him up for work, but the old man was dead.

Here is a typical example, a graduate of a Soviet high school, the son of a simple prosperous peasant, who put on a good suit (possibly stolen), became an atheist-communist, and a school teacher. The house was built by his father, and everything belonged to him.

We had to endure. No matter how much we searched for rooms, we couldn't find any. I received a telegram from my son-in-law, my daughter Ninochka's father from Moscow: "Come, take Ninochka." I had written to him several times, pleading for him to give me back my dear girl, bequeathed and handed over to me by my late Irina, but he refused. He loved her in his own way. He took her in from my friends. After my daughter, he married a communist woman. He sacrificed his love for women for his love for his daughter. He married, of course, in a Soviet manner, meaning he casually brought one woman after another into the house. She was the second. Ninochka was so afraid of this woman, who instilled disgust in her and outraged her for not being a believer, that the poor girl was unrecognizable and suffered terribly. And then I received this telegram.

I immediately left. It was just before the Soviet annual holiday on the 17th of October. On the 15th, I had the joy of seeing my son Pyotr, and on the 16th, he was arrested. It was as if I was sent the opportunity to see him before his exile. The next day, I left with Ninochka, and he was immediately sent to Kazakhstan, not to freedom, but to a camp. After six months, he was replaced with a free exile in the city of Petropavlovsk. At that time, one of the high-ranking authorities was Enukidze, who helped with his transfer. Enukidze was later shot as a counter-revolutionary. His young wife came to Pyotr with a young child, a girl, also named Irina, born after I left Moscow. They lived well there for almost three years.

However, tragically, my granddaughter died of meningitis in just three days. So, I brought Ninochka to the apartment of this horrible communist. The poor, frail, extraordinarily quiet girl, already frightened in Moscow, found herself back in conditions of fear and horror. She often cowered in a corner and hid in something to avoid hearing his scolding and yelling. Once, knowing he wouldn't return for at least three hours, I was frying pancakes in preparation for lunch with Andrey.

Unexpectedly, he arrived. Hearing the smell, he burst through the locked door into our room, broke the lock, knocked the frying pan with the pancakes to the floor, and also forcefully smashed the burning kerosene stove into pieces on the floor.

Fortunately, it burned weakly and went out without igniting the spilled kerosene. Then, grabbing a stool, he held it over my head and with sacrilegious words, like a madman, tried to strike my head. I don't know how I slipped away and ran out onto

the street. It was a cold winter day, and I had no coat. Fortunately, Ninochka wasn't home; she had been taken by a neighbor who liked and pitied her to play. Otherwise, she would have been terrified. She gave me a scarf, and I ran to the mill to Andrey, as his last words to me were: "If you return, I'll kill you and your Andrey." Andrey excused himself, and we went to the police station, unsure if we would find protection or another communist. We asked to see the chief, and we were sent to the regional one. As soon as we entered, we could tell he was from a decent background, someone who had somehow survived, and we felt encouraged. We recounted the entire incident. He immediately ordered two police officers to bring the teacher under escort, and asked us to tell him everything about him in detail. "I've been after this hooligan for a long time." They brought him in. He behaved casually, arrogantly, and, addressing the chief and the assembled police officers, he began a speech: "Comrade chief, I believe that all these noble landlords should have been exterminated long ago, and the authorities' mistake is being too lenient with them." He tried to say more, thinking he was making a strong impression with his erudition, but the chief asked, "Are you done, Shemennev? Let me tell you, if you allow yourself not only rudeness but ignorance towards these people with a single word, I will deal with you and put you in prison. Do you hear?"

The chief said to us, "Go home quietly; he won't bother you anymore." You should have seen the whole despicable figure of the stunned teacher. We didn't go home; the neighbor where Ninochka was staying gave us the front part of her apartment, moved our things in with her. This incident became known throughout the city. Everyone knew about this beast, especially the parents of children who attended the school, and we were offered a room very close to the mill by some very good peasants. We thanked God for smoothly avoiding anything worse from the teacher and for peacefully and amicably living with our new hosts. Ninochka brightened up and calmed down. We lived with them for over a year. They also had a misfortune; their eldest son, who arbitrarily became a "pioneer," was 10 years old. They were afraid of him. At that time, announcements were everywhere in schools, newspapers, and even on the walls that children who denounced their fathers and mothers for counter-revolutionary opinions, for having icons at home, or even reported that their parents were hiding something, would receive a new suit and a free trip to Crimea with full board. They envied when they saw the boy coming, and they whispered to each other, "Vanya is coming, Vanya is coming—be quiet." And he listened to everything and threatened to report the slightest remark. This was the kind of upbringing given to children. Of course, not everyone was like that, rarely, but there were those who were not corrupted by Bolshevik upbringing. In the newspapers, on the last page, there was always a list of children-heroes, for example: "Nikolai Smirnov, a student in such and such class, for betraying his parents, is awarded such and such and included in the list of children's heroism, while his father is exiled to Siberia for hiding three sacks of flour." Working with

Andrey at the mill was also not easy. The director appointed was a communist from the Union of the Godless, very much like the teacher we lived with. Finding out that Andrey was exiled for religion, he immediately loathed him and tried to cause various offenses and troubles, up to the point of not issuing the due provisions, and at that time, it was becoming increasingly difficult with food. One day, I was sitting on the porch with Ninochka, waiting for Andrey to return from the mill. He was delayed, and I had a premonition of something bad. We saw a cart coming with someone lying on it; it's so hard to write and relive it again, but let everyone know who doesn't know or doesn't believe, thanks to the false propaganda about the "Soviet paradise," the truth about how my poor innocent son suffered; there were millions like him, and this is not an exaggeration. Stalin's constitution declared to the world that children were not responsible for their parents, not in birth in the highest estate, nor in their affairs. At the time of the revolution, Andrey was three years old, and Pyotr was eight. Andrey was lying on the cart, eyes closed as if in blood, his tongue swollen and protruding, his trousers on his knees burned as if scorched, and a small wound on his right knee, while on his left knee—a deep round pit, almost across the entire knee. He couldn't say anything, lying quietly without groans. Understanding nothing, in complete despair, I sat next to him and took him to the hospital. I ran to the doctor. Seeing the condition of the sick person brought in, people waiting started shouting, "Wait your turn, no need to go first, wait your turn!" I didn't listen to anyone and rushed into the first office, asking for immediate attention. A female doctor came in, looked, and ran to get other doctors. They helped him up. Everyone gathered and said he was burned and poisoned with some alkali. After the examination, they told me that his eyes were unlikely to be healed, and he wouldn't see. But the Merciful Lord didn't subject him to this trial yet, and within a month, his eyes saw as well as before; his tongue healed, he could eat, but a deep round pit remained on his left knee, with a scar almost across the entire knee. In Bolshevik Russia, like during the time of Egyptian executions, a very special, unprecedented type of parasite appeared on the grain already stored in the barns and on the flour. Of course, this is carefully hidden from the world, and the lack of grain, and consequently, hunger, is explained by drought and poor harvest, but this, again, is a lie, the same lie. This parasite is called the "grain mite."

It is transparent, spreads instantaneously, and at a certain percentage in grain or flour, they cannot be consumed by humans and are only fed to pigs or used as manure. They say that with perfect vision, one can see the mite without a microscope, and the grain seems to breathe, swaying slightly, but I cannot confirm this. Upon the first discovery of the mite, the granaries are sprayed with a solution of caustic soda. As was the case here, the sprayer wears waterproof clothing, leather gloves, and a gas mask. Nothing of the sort was found. None of the workers agreed. The director calls Andrey, even though it had nothing to do with his role as a lab assistant, and orders him to spray the barn infected with the mite. The exiled man

could not disobey. I wrote about the result. The burned knees were from dripping drops, the eyes and tongue from inhalation. He recovered and went back to work. Two months later, he came home completely distraught and confused and said, "I arrive in the morning at the mill, and at the gate, the old groatsman, a seasoned swindler, greets me and says, 'Hello, comrade manager!' I walk past, taking those words as a usual mockery. I continue further, and the workers address me with the same words, so I ask one of them, 'Why did you all conspire today to mock me?' 'Mock you? You were appointed head of the laboratory by a directive from Almaty.' I didn't believe it at that moment; me, an exiled man of 19 years, this couldn't be true; it would be a real new misfortune for me. I entered the laboratory, called to the director. He angrily throws a paper at me, saying, 'Here, read this!' That's when I saw the horrific truth, reading the order: 'The laboratory head B. is removed from his position and A. is appointed to his post.' This position was nearly equivalent to a director's. Without the signature and permission of the head, not a single pound of flour could be released from the mill, and the mill produced thousands of pounds daily. The director was angrier than ever. He had enriched himself through deals and fraud with the groatsman and realized that this had come to an end because he understood that it was impossible to trick or force my Andrey to yield. Obviously, during the secret inspections, where experienced exiles participated, they saw that since Andrey was appointed as a lab assistant, the quality of the flour had improved, and they needed the output quantity to increase as well. 'What should I do, mother? I can't fight these old experienced wolves; they will devour me right away! I tried to refuse, but the director said it was beyond his control.' The poor head, burdened with such a significant and responsible task, started crying. I advised him to go to the GPU (State Political Directorate) to explain that he did not feel capable of such a responsible task, requiring administrative experience, and was afraid of not justifying the trust placed in him." He went immediately and said, "I'm in your power; I have no protection, and I ask the GPU to provide me with this protection and remove this responsibility from me." The response was, "This was done by the main office, and we can't change anything, try to justify the trust and don't worry."

35. Ordeal

And so began his new torment. For a large quantity of flour intended for shipment to the army of the Moscow District, he imposed a ban as unsuitable. The groatsman came to him with malice and declared, "What, do you want to fight us? We'll break your horns!" — "Do whatever you want, sand has been added to the flour." — "Listen, comrade," he began in a fawning tone, "don't obstruct us; it's true we added a little sand, but they won't notice it." It turned out that, hoping to persuade him, they had already loaded the train for shipment without his permission and signature. He was called to the director. "You are not authorizing the shipment, look, be careful not to break your head; the train is already loaded, should we not unload it?" — "I cannot authorize it; I have instructions that I will not deviate from as an honest worker, firstly, and secondly, in Moscow, there is also an analysis at the reception, and they will blame me, not you." The director also softened his tone and tried to convince him but failed. The flour had to be unloaded and used for the former large pig farming near the mill.

Another time, knowing that the flour in one barn was infested with mites and not allowed for human consumption, they baked bread worth 6,000 rubles for the daily distribution. He went to the bakery and took the bread for analysis; it turned out to contain mites in unacceptable quantities. He prohibited the distribution of the bread. Again, there was a dispute with the director and pointing out that a new batch of bread could not be baked for the day. Andrey filed a report, which the director could not sign, stating that he was relinquishing responsibility and signed as the head of the laboratory on the unsuitability of the flour, offering the director to take responsibility for authorizing the bread distribution. As a result, the bread was taken to the pig farm, and the workers received double rations only the next day. My Andrey grew thin; the fight against the communist fraudsters was beyond his strength, and few would dare to do so, forever under the threat of slander and revenge. He wrote to the authorities several times, appealed to the GPU, but he was not released from his position. Finally, he went and said, "Do with me as you wish, but I can't take it anymore." A week later, an order came from Almaty: A. was to be trained as a technician (I don't remember the surname), and upon passing the exam with them, he would be considered relieved of his duties as head of the laboratory. He struggled for three months with an incompetent technician. Finally, on the 29th of April, he passed the exam, and a joyful Andrey returned home. It felt like a suffocating, heavy burden had been lifted off his shoulders. On the 30th, he went to work, and in the yard, two huge figures made of plywood were being painted: one depicting the enemy of communism Chamberlain, and the other one Andrey. On May 1st, on the day of the general celebration, there was supposed to be a parade, and these two figures were to lead the procession. Andrey went to the GPU and reported this. From there, they called the director and reprimanded him, ordering the

immediate destruction of Andrey's figure. On May 2nd, when he approached the mill, he saw a huge poster on the gate: "A. is dismissed from work as a counter-revolutionary."

(This was the director's revenge, as he had the authority to dismiss the lab assistant). Being dismissed from that job was a relief, but we had no means of survival, and there were three of us. At that time, in Aktobe, there was such a terrible famine that dead bodies lay on the streets, or dying of hunger with their last breaths. Mostly, these were poor local Kyrgyz people. Little children abandoned by their mothers ran around the market square with soul-tearing cries. I saw how they were placed on the steps of the church and quickly left. Or passersby picked them up and also left them on the steps. In the evening, a truck would come and take these children somewhere. It was rumored, and it seemed that they were simply being destroyed. I tried to point out to the police some of the dying individuals, but they just waved their hand, and some would say, "What should we do with them!" Andrey did not have to wait long for work; after four days, he received an offer to become an instructor-lab assistant at the elevator to train those who wanted to become lab assistants. He started on September 10th, and on the 13th, the local newspaper published: "It is not surprising that during the inspection from Moscow, the perpetrator of embezzlement was identified, as the grain receiver was managed by the former nobleman A. (the entire elevator management was under trial), expelled for counter-revolution." We couldn't believe our eyes. We wrote a refutation, stating that it was a misunderstanding, that A. had only joined the elevator three days ago, not as a grain receiver but as a lab assistant. I took it to the newspaper. The newspaper refused, so I went to the GPU prosecutor, who said, "We know very well that you are absolutely honest and that this is slander against you, but according to the law, a certain category of people cannot clear their name in the press." This accusation not only affected Andrey's morale but also his heart, as all the false accusations piled up on him. As a deeply religious person, in the intervals of sorrow, he was always cheerful and resolute. The inspection proved that he had never worked as a grain receiver and had only been at the elevator for three days, but he was ordered to leave his job. He was then taken on as an assistant and deputy to the chief bread inspector of the region. Andrey thought he would always be with him, but the man, honest but lazy, who liked to relax with his family, lived several versts away from the city (not a communist), often traveled around the region, and, as he told Andrey, was confident in leaving his duties to him as an honest worker. Once he left and did not return for a long time. As the inspector, he had to inspect the mill twice a month, from which Andrey was dismissed. The situation was difficult and unpleasant. He was now the senior above the mill director. He called the inspector, who instructed him in writing to conduct the inspection himself. After inspecting and checking all the granaries and warehouses, Andrey concluded that the mill should be shut down for three days due to a significant mite infestation. The

director went mad: "Have you gone crazy? Do you know what it means to shut down such a mill? It's hundreds of thousands in losses!" — "I know, but nevertheless, I find it necessary to stop the mill." The director complained to the GPU. The GPU immediately called the inspector, and the next day, a commission of GPU representatives and officials in charge of the grain business was appointed. One can imagine the anxiety of the young exile if his decision were deemed unjustified; he would have been accused of deliberate sabotage, and the trial would have been swift.

All night we didn't sleep, as the forces were simply beyond belief. Pale but as composed as ever, my persecuted Andrey, with a prayer in his heart, went to the mill where his fate was to be decided. Ninotchka and I waited anxiously for his return. From a distance, we could tell by his quick pace and waving that he was in good spirits. The commission and the bread inspector signed a protocol confirming the correctness of the deputy bread inspector's decision to stop the mill for three days. The director sent a report to Almaty requesting his (the director's) removal from the job as he refused to obey the exiled boy, whom he had dismissed for counter-revolutionary activities. But removing him proved inconvenient for the communists since he was a significant activist and a member of the godless union. Andrey was summoned by the GPU and told, "We have nothing against your work; choose any service you want, but it is uncomfortable for an exiled boy to hold such a responsible position." The next day, Andrey was appointed as the cashier in a very large regional cooperative. The whole town knew about his job experiences; the manager was not a communist and needed an honest worker. I was alarmed. Through his hands and under his responsibility, large sums of money had to pass. He boldly accepted the position, started earning much better, and received thanks for his three-month report. One time he came home again, agitated and offended. A Moscow inspection had arrived. Learning that the young cashier was an exiled boy from a notable noble family, they reprimanded the chief and ordered his immediate removal. "What do you want, for him to steal the money and disappear? Can you place such individuals in such a responsible financial role?" The chief responded (in Andrey's presence): "We are only calm now. Before him, all the Young Communist League members were assigned, one with 25 thousand, another around the same." The inspection appointed their Young Communist League member. The chief did not want to leave Andrey completely without earnings and offered him the only available position in the file department. Poor Andrey was upset and told me, "I don't want this; what will people think: from cashier to the file department? I don't want it at all." I thought it best not to decline but to accept the position. He disliked it very much, but he never went against my wishes. The inspection left for towns and villages in the Aktobe region. Two months later, on their return journey to Moscow, they visited the cooperative, and the first question was, "So, are you satisfied with the new cashier?" — "Well, three days ago, he took 20 thousand and fled. Where do

we find him now?" A triumphant Andrey arrived. The commission allowed him to return. There was still a year left until the end of his exile, and he stayed in that position until then. He was summoned once to the GPU and told, "Tomorrow there will be a general meeting of all workers; they must consent to accept someone into military service. The question of you will be raised. You will be called, and if asked why you were exiled, make sure not to say it was for religion and the church." — "What should I say?" — "Say that you were exiled on charges of counter-revolution under Article 58, paragraph 10." He was not summoned but was appointed without appearing in person. We were very worried because if they decided to accept him, he could not refuse (this was not a question of religion), and we really did not want that under any circumstances. The recruitment was announced, and he received a summons for inspection. I told him, "Go to the GPU and ask because Petya was rejected based on his surname, as stated in his passport; perhaps, by God's grace, they will reject you too." This time, he was afraid to follow my advice. He was examined, shaved, but due to a severe heart condition, he was given a long deferral and assigned for treatment. The next day, we read in the local newspaper: "Vile individuals from the nobility are infiltrating the army to spread corruption, so it is necessary to identify and expel them." I reproached him for disobeying. He left without saying where he was going. When he returned home, he told me what he had done, hoping to be completely released: "I went to the military council, held jointly with the GPU, and requested permission to enter. I entered: they were sitting at a large table covered with red fabric, all high-ranking officials wearing medals. They all looked at me in surprise, taken aback by my audacity. 'What's the matter?' asked one. I replied, 'Yesterday, the military commission examined me and conditionally accepted me until my heart is healed. I came to announce that I am a nobleman with a title.'" They all exchanged glances, and the chief said, "Well done for coming." They themselves understood that it took great determination and courage to face them. They left him alone, and two months later, his term of exile ended. He was not given any restrictions and could even return to Moscow, but we thought it safer to stay away from the center and decided to return to Almaty to start our life there. Another significant aspect drew us there: we learned about the existence of an underground church there.

And so, we settled in Almaty, and Andrey resumed his work in the cooperative. Life seemed to be stabilizing after the tumultuous years we had experienced. We were content, finding solace in each other's company and in our faith. Andrey was dedicated to his work, and I focused on maintaining our household and supporting him in every way. It was a peaceful time, a period of rebuilding and rediscovery after the trials and tribulations we had faced during the revolutionary years.

As we settled into our new life in Almaty, we became involved in the underground church community. The existence of the catacomb church was a beacon of hope for

us, a place where we could practice our faith freely, away from the prying eyes of the authorities. The spiritual guidance and support we found in this community were invaluable, helping us navigate the challenges of post-revolutionary Russia.

In the catacomb church, we found a sense of belonging and unity with fellow believers who shared our commitment to the Orthodox faith. The underground nature of the church added an element of secrecy and danger, but it also deepened our bond with each other and with our faith. We participated in clandestine services, prayer meetings, and religious discussions, strengthening our spiritual resolve and reaffirming our dedication to God.

Through our involvement in the catacomb church, we found a sense of purpose and solidarity in the face of adversity. The challenges we had faced in the past years had tested our faith, but the underground church provided us with a sanctuary where we could worship freely and commune with like-minded believers. Our experiences in the catacomb church became an integral part of our journey, shaping our spiritual growth and deepening our connection to our faith.

As we look back on those years in Almaty, we are grateful for the support and guidance we found in the underground church community. It was a period of spiritual renewal and resilience, a time when our faith was tested and strengthened in the face of persecution and hardship. Andrey's unwavering dedication to his beliefs and his commitment to serving others inspired us all and remains a beacon of light in our memories of those challenging times.

36. Catacomb Church

In Aktobe, we were deprived of any church services for over a year. Unexpected solace arrived when a relatively young archimandrite, Father Arseny, visited. He was acquainted with the exiled family I mentioned earlier, who lived with us in the beginning in a dugout and slept on the table and benches. They gave him our address, and he came right away, staying overnight. He quietly performed the liturgy at night, and we were able to partake in the Holy Sacraments. He was the monk who had not been shot in Tuapse but exiled for ten years, and who provided me with information about Abbess Antonina. It was from him that I first learned about the existence of the secret Catacomb Church in Russia, led by Metropolitan Joseph of St. Petersburg and organized with the blessing of Metropolitan Peter of Krutitsy. Father Arseny was ordained a hieromonk and was fortunate to support him materially. The church in Almaty was dug deep into the ground, and it was consecrated by the metropolitan who arrived secretly for this purpose. As Father Alexander, who was tortured on Bear Mountain near Murmansk, bequeathed to me, neither Andrey nor I ever had any contact with the Sergianist clergy who mentioned the authorities and Metropolitan Sergius.

Once, a respectable-looking academic priest, Father Makary, came to us with some acquaintances. I knew in advance that he was a Sergianist. They also deported such individuals, sensing in some of them a sincere belief in God, which was so terrifying to the Soviets personified by the authorities. When he came to us, he raised his hand to bless me, but I declined and did not accept it, saying, "Forgive me, Father, I cannot accept your blessing; I know that you belong to the Sergianist church, you mention the authorities and Sergius." He did not expect this, turned to Andrey with his raised hand, but he also did not accept. He left without saying a word, feeling greatly offended, and told my acquaintance, "What this old lady did, I can somewhat excuse, but this young man daring not to accept my blessing is outrageous." A few days later, he returned and no longer attempted to bless but said, "I am very intrigued by you and your son; I would like to have a conversation and hear your point of view." I expressed my definite view on the Sergianist church and Sergius. After that, we met regularly, had many conversations, being of completely opposite beliefs. He set up something like a small church in his room, conducted prayers, and asked Andrey to come to sing and read, without mentioning either the authorities or Sergius. We declined. As time passed, we became friends, but not on the issue of the church, although there were reconciliatory notes in his views towards ours. Once he had a dispute with Archimandrite Arseny, who came to us again, but both remained firm in their opinions.

He was only exiled for two years, and when his term ended, and he came to say goodbye, he said, "Our conversations have not been in vain and fruitless. I am going to Moscow, and there I will find a resolution to our disagreements. I promise that if I am convinced that I am wrong, I will honestly inform you." He left. Three months later, we received a letter from his son informing us that upon his father's arrival in Moscow, he officially renounced and left the Sergianist church. He refused church services, for which he was exiled for ten years, without the right to correspondence, to an unknown destination.

What was happening at that time was difficult to believe. Sometimes I would sew dresses or lingerie for people to earn some money. Once a woman, who turned out to be a teacher from the city of Aralsk on the Aral Sea, came to have clothes made. She dressed up, as she said; she was a typical example of the Soviet intelligentsia, speaking in the most vulgar colloquial language. It was a mystery how she could teach children. She wore silk dresses and needed a fancy dress for guests and church visits. When I asked her if there was a church in Aralsk, she replied, "Of course. We have a wonderful woman priest." I thought I misheard and asked again, "What did you say, a woman priest?" "Yes, why are you so surprised? Does it matter since she both administers sacraments and performs all duties just like a man." To my horror and fear of such a fact, she was deeply offended, probably finding me backward and ignorant. Yes! What things I've seen and experienced, but this was the epitome of

the most heinous concepts that were taking place in the church under the Bolsheviks at that time.

So, we decided to move back to Almaty. It was in August. The three of us were happy and relieved, not thinking about new misfortunes for the time being. Andrey was free! At each station, we bought and enjoyed fruits, which we had been deprived of for three years. Archimandrite Arseny greeted us and brought us to a nice little room with an earthen floor, the only one he could arrange for us, but it was at least from a believer, a lone peasant who had managed to escape from a northern camp, make his way to the southernmost point, and build a two-room hut. The hut was in a garden.

In the same room as the owner lived an old, nearly blind priest, exiled from St. Petersburg, who was a close friend of Father John of Kronstadt. Before his death, Father John had given him his embroidered sticharion that he had worn. Occasionally, a hermit from the mountains, an old monk, would visit, the owner's brother whom he had signed out when he settled but, fearing persecution, settled in the mountains. All of us, including Ninochka, found ourselves in a beloved environment. We set up sleeping nooks in the room: Andrey slept below, Ninochka above him, and I slept on a small stove, and when it was heated in winter, I slept on the table. It was so nice. If it weren't for the eternal fear of the GPU, we would have been completely happy. Andrey got a job at the slaughterhouse laboratory. I sent Ninochka to school. It was so difficult for this weak, miniature child. Once (still at the very beginning), she came home from school in tears and choking, saying, "Grandma, I won't go to school anymore, I won't go for anything. One boy saw the cross on me, grabbed it, started tearing it, called other students; they surrounded me, all pulling, jumping around, and laughing. The teacher came in, saw me crying and not knowing how to escape, found out what happened, and asked, 'Why do you wear a cross?' I replied, 'Because I believe in God, and my mommy believed, and my grandma, and I will wear the cross.' The teacher sent her home because she couldn't stop crying, and told me to come to the school immediately. I praised, comforted, and reassured my good granddaughter. I went to school: 'Don't you know that wearing crosses is not allowed?' I replied that I knew but did not obey and would not remove it from my girl because I am a believer. 'This is the first time I've had such a case,' she said. 'The cross must be removed!' I refused. Of course, I would have taken her out of school immediately, but I didn't have the right because schooling was mandatory, and in case of protest, the child was taken away from the parents and became the property of the Soviets. Then the headmistress said, 'Take off the cross from her neck so it's not visible, and if you refuse to remove it completely, then pin or sew it to her shirt.' I consulted with Father Arseny, and with his blessing, I did just that to avoid upsetting the child, who suffered from it, and not give any reason to mock the Holy Cross. So both Andrey and Ninochka always had a cross on them, but it was sewn on rather than hanging on a string around their

necks. Another new trial began for us: Ninochka was forced to join the Pioneers. Once again, this clever girl, with the determination of an adult, refused, and when asked "why," she responded again, "Because I believe in God." They called me again, and by God's grace, until 1942 when I parted ways with her, probably forever, she was neither a Pioneer nor a Komsomol member.

In addition to being very advanced for her age, serious, experiencing only sadness almost from birth, she had a natural gift for drawing. I say "had" because all the facts mentioned above were compiled by the GPU, and upon reaching a certain age, such individuals were arrested and exiled to Siberian labor camps. When I parted ways with Ninochka, she was 17 years old, finishing school after completing all nine grades as the top student. I hope that her father, with whom she lived for the last three years in my presence, did not shake her beliefs, which would be a new sorrow for me.

He is a man of compromises, and I only hope for her firmness and memories of her mother and me. When she turned 11 in Almaty, there were Pushkin celebrations. Each school had to contribute something to the exhibition in memory of Pushkin. It was decided to paint, in colors and on a significantly enlarged scale, four drawings taken from the pre-revolutionary magazine "Stolitsa i Usadba": Pushkin's birthplace, his nanny's grave, and two other scenes. No one, not even from the oldest class, wanted to take on this task. Someone said, "Maybe Ninochka can do it." She was called into the teacher's room, and as I mentioned before, she was born prematurely at seven months and remained very tiny but very pretty, with big expressive black eyes. Teachers from other classes who did not know her smiled. They showed her the drawings, and the school principal asked, "Ninochka, can you do this work?" A shy voice replied, "I will try." The principal then said, "Well, if you can do it, you will receive fabric for a new dress, lingerie, and in addition, a box of good watercolor paints and brushes." We were very poor with clothing, and when she came home, she said to me, "Grandma, if I do this, it will be easier for you, you won't have to buy fabric for a dress, I'll try my best." What this 10-year-old child did was absolutely incredible. When these paintings were framed at the exhibition, both locals and visitors from many places, even from Moscow, teachers and educational workers, asked and wanted to see the talented student who created them, expecting, of course, to see or learn that it was someone from the older grades and could not believe that it was the work of a girl who had not yet turned 11.

A month passed, two months passed—no fabric, no paints. She was summoned to the so-called Komsomol cell, and they said, "The Komsomol council has decided not to give you any reward for the drawings because you refused to become a Pioneer." Coming home, she didn't cry but only said, "I don't want anything from them, but how nasty those Komsomol members are." Yes! She was right!

One time we were sitting in the garden with the owner, it was completely dark. We were sitting at the table, with a large bush behind us. We were talking, as always, quietly. Suddenly, there was a crackling of twigs in the bush, and the owner shone a flashlight towards it. To our horror, we saw a GPU agent running out of it. Another time, the following incident occurred. The old priest who lived with the owner in our room was conducting evening prayers. I was reading because Andrey always served at the Catacomb Church under Archimandrite Arseny. Besides the priest, the owner, and me, Ninochka was also present. Suddenly, the owner's very large and fierce dog towards strangers started barking uncontrollably, with a kind of ferocious howling. She lunged at someone outside the window. A man's voice cried out. We had to stop the service, and we all went outside. It was a dark night. No amount of shouting could distract the dog, named Malchik, from the person she had latched onto by the collar. She would have bitten him to death if we hadn't managed to pull her away. We immediately understood the situation, the dog recognized the enemy. Before us stood a pale GPU agent pretending to be drunk (a common tactic when they were caught eavesdropping). He tried to convince us that he didn't remember how he ended up in the garden under our window. Deceitfulness everywhere!

37. Metropolitan Joseph

I got distracted and didn't write about the impression of the city of Almaty after our three-year absence. It was unrecognizable. Only an evil will of the diabolical, Bolshevik power could change and disfigure all its domestic beauty and even nature. The Bolshevik slogan "Destroy everything old and build something new" was practically realized. Our eyes beheld a scene: small cozy one-story houses on the main streets were replaced by two-story buildings, all in the same Jewish boxy square style as in other cities in Russia. Buildings could not exceed two floors due to earthquakes, and even those were constructed on a special foundation, following the "American system," supposedly guaranteeing their protection from destruction. Almost all the wonderful fruit orchards in the city were cut down, and houses now stood where the greenery once flourished. Asphalt covered the main streets, and a policeman in white gloves stood guard. These details clashed with the semi-Asiatic, dirty Kyrgyz way of life. The market was destroyed, not a single camel was in sight! Where did they all go? No carpets, no Eastern tents. Everything was dead. The Kyrgyz people were furious at the interference and disfigurement of their natural way of life. Like everywhere, they were envious of others' property. Communists emerged among them. The difference in material wealth immediately became apparent. Some were stripped to destitution, while others luxuriated. The Kyrgyz people hated their own Communists. Councils established a national theater, and Kyrgyz artists emerged.

At that time, the population was starving. The free-spirited Kyrgyz people had to stand in line for hours to receive minimal food rations based on cards. The Communists had an abundance of everything. The population particularly despised one actress who enjoyed the favor of the Bolsheviks. The artists organized a picnic in the mountains. Laden with wine and snacks, they ate, drank, sang, and reveled. The actress had a seven-year-old daughter. When they were about to leave, the girl was missing. They called, shouted, searched, but she was not found. Night fell, they sent a rider to report immediately to the GPU. A squad of militia arrived with lanterns. Not far from the picnic spot, they found the girl hanging from a tree.

I met a female artist-sculptor who was also exiled with her husband. He was lying sick with tuberculosis on the first floor, and below was a basement where a woman lived, rumored to be a GPU agent. Both the husband and wife, especially the husband, were believers, which is why they were exiled. We always spoke quietly, even though the windows and doors were tightly closed, thinking that no one could hear us. One night, a car pulled up; in the heat, wet with sweat, the husband, sentenced to death by doctors, was taken from his bed and driven away. The wife was naturally inconsolable. The day after the arrest, she opened the stove in the room and was surprised to see light underneath. She discovered a square cut out

under the stove, where all conversations were being eavesdropped on. From all these examples, it is evident how dreadful life was: no moment of peace, nowhere... We greatly respected Archimandrite Arseny, especially since he was beloved by Metropolitan Joseph. Through him, we could maintain contact with him. Metropolitan Joseph was living in Chimkent at that time. Initially, at the beginning of his exile, he lived in a small town called Aulieta. He was not allowed to stay in a room but was placed in a shed with livestock, separated by a pole. A church dug into the ground was in Archimandrite Arseny's apartment. There was a hatch in the front covered with a carpet. Upon lifting the cover, a staircase led to a small basement. You couldn't tell that beneath the carpet was the entrance to the church. In one corner of the basement, there was a hole in the ground filled with stones. The stones were removed, and one had to crawl three steps while bending down to enter the tiny church. Many icons were present, and the lamps were burning. Despite being of tall stature, Metropolitan Joseph visited this church secretly twice. It created a special atmosphere, but I must admit that the fear of being discovered during the service, especially at night, was difficult to overcome. When the large chain dog barked in the yard, although muffled, it was still audible underground, and everyone expected a reprimand and the sound of the GPU when they heard it.

Everything went smoothly throughout 1936 and until September 1937. Andrey sang with a nun. On August 26th, Metropolitan Joseph visited us on the occasion of my Angel's day. He was a wonderful, humble, unwavering man of prayer. This reflected in his appearance and eyes, like a mirror. Of tall stature, with a large white beard and an extraordinarily kind face, he was truly captivating, and one would never want to part with him. His monastic attire was carefully chosen, just like his hair - otherwise, he would have been arrested immediately on the street because he was being monitored and had no right to leave. He personally mentioned that Patriarch Tikhon offered to appoint him as his first deputy immediately after his election.

This is something that is not yet mentioned in the history of church guardianship. He recognized Metropolitan Peter of Krutitsy as the legitimate head of the Church and maintained secret communication with him until his last arrest in September 1937 when rumors were circulating about Metropolitan Peter's death. He spent over an hour with us over tea, recounting the difficult life in the shed where he had to endure snakes hanging from the ceiling, praying amidst the bleating, braying, and grunting of animals, and enduring mercilessly poor food. All these conditions were evidently the cause of his illness. At times, he suffered greatly from ulcers in his intestines. But he bore it all like a Righteous man. If he spoke about the difficult persecutions, it was only because we all remembered the cruelties of the GPU. Archimandrite Arseny shared one form of torture he witnessed:

"When they were taken through Siberia, the frost was severe. There was a bath carriage on the train. They made us run naked through the carriages into the bath. We gladly doused ourselves with hot water and warmed up a bit because the carriages were hardly heated. Without providing anything to dry ourselves, we were rushed back with wet heads. On the iron platform, they deliberately delayed us, and our wet feet instantly froze to the metal. At the command 'Forward!', we peeled our bloodied frozen soles off."

The next day, after spending the night at Archimandrite Arseny's, Metropolitan Joseph left for his place. Now he was living in different conditions. After 15 years or so, he was allowed to find an apartment in Chimkent. Archimandrite Arseny arranged a room for him to live quietly, taking care of his food not only for sustenance but also for his intestinal issues. He first got him a zither and then an accordion, which brought joy to the Metropolitan, a great musician. He sang psalms, putting them to music.

On the 15th of September, we unexpectedly received great, very great joy. My son Peter, after completing his exile, came to us after learning our address through my sister in Moscow (correspondence was allowed during voluntary exile). He arrived with his young wife to live together. They had just lost a child, as I mentioned previously. Temporarily, we all stayed in our one room, where we had moved two months before, and then decided to find a separate room nearby for their convenience. Due to Andrey's honest work, his superiors appointed him to a three-month accounting course, with the announcement that the top-performing student in the competition would receive a diploma as a senior accountant. He was set to complete the course on September 25 with this qualification, as he was the best among all. This would provide him with a good income, and he was so happy, saying, "My dear, you won't have to stand at the market selling flowers anymore, I will be the sole earner."

Peter found a room very close to us, and on September 24th, after preparing it, they were supposed to move into it. On the evening of the 23rd, we all sat gloomy, anticipating misfortune. Arrests began across the city. This was the reign of Yezhov. At one o'clock in the morning, the children and Ninochka were sleeping, and I hadn't gone to bed yet when a car stopped outside our room. I woke the children up. The door was harshly knocked on, and the familiar GPU shout rang out: "Open up!" There was nothing to be done; I opened the door. The GPU quickly entered with three armed soldiers, the GPU holding a revolver. I remember feeling desperate, realizing that they were about to take away the most precious things in my earthly life, my children, and I asked sharply, "What do you want here?" - "Is Andrey Urusov here?" I cannot write all the details. Despite reconciling with God's Will, the memories tear my soul apart. He was placed in the middle of the room in just his underwear and searched thoroughly to see if he had any weapons. Genuine underwear! What were they afraid of and of whom? What weapon could anyone

have, especially an exile for their belief in God and the Church! The search began. They turned everything upside down, of course, finding nothing. Despite my desire to approach Andrey, sitting on the bed now, in these final moments of parting, perhaps forever on earth, I was not allowed to get close to him. He gestured to me with his eyes towards the corner with the icons, where the lamp always burned. I understood that he was calling on me to pray. I cried so much that when my future daughter-in-law asked me to come closer, she was allowed. Turning to poor Peter, he said, "I didn't know you had another son! And is this your daughter?" She replied, "No, I am his fiancée." Andrey was told to get dressed. His warm jacket was being repaired by the tailor, and so were his shoes. He put on a light coat and canvas shoes. We had no money, except for 40 rubles, which the GPU took, supposedly for Andrey. They took him away. I was allowed to bid farewell. We hugged for the last time. I told him, "Wherever they send you, I will follow you." But the Lord judged differently, and I never saw him again. He had told me the night before, "Don't ask them for me; I don't want that, I am your son!" It's been 15 years in September since this happened, but the memory of those moments is as fresh as if it were yesterday, only the feeling of desperate sorrow that engulfed me has changed to a submissive acceptance. My children - martyrs for Christ. Not remembering myself, I ran to Archimandrite Arseny at dawn and saw a car and GPU agents approaching him. Luckily, they didn't notice me. We had to save Peter and his wife. As morning came, they left for Tomsk, where my fiancée's brother, who was also living in voluntary exile, was. He joined the theater as an actor.

Poor Ninochka, how did this unhappy, remaining 6-year-old orphan's soul cope? I couldn't work; I didn't know what to do with her! I just cried, prayed, and stood at the prison gates with her for hours. When we returned home, on the second day, we found Ninochka's father visiting her after three years of separation. Even a day earlier, I couldn't have thought about parting ways with her, but there I saw a clear indication from God. After all, they could have arrested me, and what would have happened to her? I parted ways with her! Her father took her with him.

For a whole month, I went to the GPU, not asking for his release but for the transfer of his coat, shoes, and something to eat, requesting permission to see him. They gave me felt boots and a warm fur hat as gifts for him. Permission was not granted. On November 8th, I was informed: Andrey Urusov was sent on the 5th to the Far East without the right to correspondence for 10 years. I prayed only not to fall into despair from sorrow, and the Lord helped me endure further sorrows, and here I am, living already 10 years after that.

I decided to catch up with him. Neighbors sold everything I had for me, and other exiles helped me with money, and I set off on the road to Siberia because I was told he was sent to Nagaya Bay in the Kolyma region. Nagaya Bay is on the northernmost shore of the Sea of Okhotsk. I thought I would catch up with the transport by passenger train. In the compartment next to mine, there sat a high-ranking GPU

official adorned with medals, apparently having executed missions of arrests and sentences, a large, elderly man. On the second night, as he caught me in the corridor of the train, he asked sternly, and of course, uncompassionately: "Citizen, why are you crying like that?" I told him about Andrey. "Why was he arrested?" I replied, "Without any guilt." - "That cannot be!" - "No, it is like this: he was taken for his faith in God and religion!" - "Well, then he must be guilty!" - "According to you, yes, but not in my opinion." - "What's the surname?" I told him. "Well, he won't sit for more than five years." Perhaps, he himself was the one passing sentences on my Andrey and couldn't find any other charges against him. He allowed me to walk to Novosibirsk and take a train from there, informing me that a train from Alma-Ata was still standing there. The temperature was above minus 50 degrees Celsius. We passed under the train carriages, not less than 20 freight trains with completely sealed wagons, guarded by military patrols. These were transports with exiles from various cities in Russia. On the same day Andrey was arrested, all the clergy of the catacomb Josephites churches were arrested in the surrounding areas of Alma-Ata throughout Kazakhstan, serving voluntary exile for not recognizing the Soviet church. They were all sent into exile for 10 years without the right to correspond, and as I later found out, among them was Metropolitan Joseph. On the last leg, there was a train from Alma-Ata. In the middle of the train was a first-class carriage.

I knocked. A small Jewish man in a military GPU uniform and two others came out. He was surprised to see a lady by the train with a handcar at midnight when no one was allowed to walk on the tracks, let alone crawl under carriages with those who had been arrested. When asked what I needed, I said I was looking for my son to pass on warm clothing, provisions, and money to him. One of them, upon hearing the surname, said, "It seems we have someone like that!" The Jewish man told me, "Go to the station, and come back early in the morning, we will check the lists during this time, and if your son is here, I will grant you a meeting, and you can personally pass on what you want." The night felt like several years to me. At 7 a.m., I was back at the train, again with the handcar.

I bought provisions, everything that was available at the station. They told me, "He is not on the lists!" Meanwhile, this transport had been sent from Alma-Ata on the 5th. It had been traveling for several days, and I imagined he must be freezing. I bought a ticket and went to Tomsk to see Peter, giving him a telegram. In that severe cold, he and his wife, poorly dressed in cold boots since everything had been taken away in Moscow, and there was nothing to wear in exile, met me at the station. For three days, I lived surrounded by warm love and care. Both Peter and Olenka comforted me, telling me not to worry, that they would find out where Andrey was, and I would go to him. On the fourth night, there was another knock, and the same GPU yell. They took my Peter away. I saw him sitting, somehow bent, in an open truck through the window. It was a moonlit night. The driver and the GPU were in the cabin. I handed over everything I had brought for Andrey. His last words to his young wife were, "Olenka, go to Moscow immediately with my mother." Despite all my pleas, she did not come with me and stayed with her brother, saying that she would only find out Peter's fate in the GPU, how many years he would be sentenced for, and where he would be sent, and then come to Moscow. (She was born a princess Gna). A month later, I received a letter from the landlady of the apartment. Your fiancée and her brother have been arrested and taken away for 10 years.

38. Mozhaysk

When my sons were arrested in 1937 and, according to the GPU, were sent into exile for 10 years without the right to correspondence, there is nothing to say about my maternal grief. I shed many, many bitter tears, but not once did I complain even fleetingly, seeking solace only in the Church, which could only be found in the Catacomb Church. I searched for it everywhere and always found it very soon by God's grace, pouring out my grief to the true, God-pleasing priests who performed secret liturgies there. This was the case when I left Siberia for Moscow after my sons' arrest. My sister, who, to my horror, recognized the Soviet Church, was not arrested despite being a lady-in-waiting. She pointed me to a former childhood friend with whom she had parted ways regarding Church matters because the friend actively participated in secret liturgies. This lady and other members of this holy Church welcomed me with open arms. I was not allowed to live in Moscow and settled in the city of Mozhaysk, 100 versts away. Completely penniless, I obtained a patent to sell artificial flowers at a Moscow market. I was permitted to stay with my sister for no more than a day, but the janitor helped me. All janitors were appointed by the GPU to report on everything that was happening in the house. The janitor of that house lived in a damp basement with his family in extreme poverty. He came to me and asked, "Do you want me to help you? And you help me! I am obligated to report to someone immediately upon their arrival, but you come and stay for two weeks or however long you want, and I won't report. If there is a search or inspection, I will show that you arrived this morning, and you can help me little by little from the sale of your flowers."

Of course, I agreed, and that's how it was until 1941 when unexpectedly, the Germans crossed the border, and on the same day, no one except, of course, the servants of Satan, was allowed to enter Moscow. While staying with my sister for a long time, I attended all the church services held by private individuals in various areas of Moscow. We had a priest and confessor, Father Antony, an elderly hieromonk. I constantly heard, "As the elder commands, what the elder says, etc." I asked Father Antony where I could see this elder to pour out my grief and find comfort! When he was mentioned, it was always with extraordinary reverence, and he was referred to as an extraordinary saint. "No," Father Antony said, "that's not possible; anything you need from him, I will convey to him." In 1941, in Mozhaysk, I met a lady exiled from Moscow due to her husband's arrest and her only daughter. She turned out to be a member of the Catacomb Church and had been the spiritual daughter of the elder from the very beginning of his priesthood. She informed me that the elder (she did not mention his name) now lived two versts from Mozhaysk, and she secretly attended his services. When I asked if she could ask him to receive me, she replied, "No, that's impossible because all the worshipers are deprived of this since the GPU has been searching for him for 25 years, and he travels across

Russia from one place to another, seemingly prompted by the Holy Spirit when it's time to leave." Of course, I mourned, but there was nothing to be done. Trinity Day that year was on June 7th. As nothing happens by chance, so it was here: I couldn't be in Moscow and sat sadly alone in my room the evening before. I heard a light knock on the window, looked, and was amazed. A not-so-young nun, dressed in monastic attire despite the strict prohibition, was knocking. It was late evening. I opened the door, and she came out to me, saying, "Father, Elder Father Seraphim invites you to visit him tomorrow morning, and if you wish, you can confess and partake of the Holy Sacrament." She directed me on the path to take and to be cautious: in front of the village was a field of ripening rye, and she advised me to bend over. The road through this field led to the house where the elder lived, and right across the road was the executive committee building. There is no need to describe my feelings when the nun, extremely welcoming with her bright face, left. Her name was Mother N. At the elder's house, there were two nuns, the other was named Mother V. They were inseparable from him. Sometimes the elder lived calmly for even two months, and unexpectedly at various times of the day and night, he suddenly said, "Well, it's time to go!" They would pack their backpacks with all the liturgical items and immediately leave in whatever direction the elder led them until he stopped and entered someone's house, apparently guided by a higher power. Early in the morning, I went. I entered not from the street but as instructed from the back door. Before me stood a wonderful, not yet very old monk. I cannot find the words to describe his holy appearance. The feeling of reverence was indescribable. I confessed, and it was a wonderful experience. After the service and my partaking of the Holy Sacrament, he invited me to have lunch. Also present was the lady I mentioned earlier. Both nuns and another spiritual daughter who had come from Moscow were there. Oh, the grace of God: I will never forget the conversation he honored me with, lasting several hours.

The day after experiencing that spiritual happiness during my visit to Elder Seraphim, I learned from the lady that the next day, while sitting over tea, Elder Seraphim stood up and said to the nuns, "Well, it's time to go!" They immediately gathered and left, and within half an hour, no more, the GPU arrived looking for him, but the Lord had hidden him.

Three months passed, the Germans were already in Mozhaysk, when there was another light knock on the window, and the same nun N. came to me, saying, "Father Seraphim in Borovsk, who had been occupied by the Germans for a day (40 versts from Moscow), sent me to convey his blessing to you and to tell you that he is Seraphim, the one to whom Hieromonk A. (in Optina) paid homage."

Here is an explanation of this mysterious elder from the book by S. A. Nilus "On the Bank of God's River," chapter "Let the Children Come to Me" (from the Optina Diary of Nilus):

"Today, a new acquaintance of ours left Optina, who had become close to us like a dear sister in the short time she spent in the monastery, closer still - like a sister in the spirit of Christ. Let's call her Vera, after her great faith. In early January of this year, I received a letter from the city of Tambov in which a Christian woman wrote me a few warm words approving of my work in the field of Christ. The letter was signed with a full name, but this name was completely unknown to me. On May 25th, my wife and I were standing at the refectory. A lady, modestly dressed, was leading a five-year-old boy by the hand, passing by our place. For some reason, my wife and I paid attention to her. After the Liturgy, before the beginning of the Royal Prayer service, we saw her again as she passed by us to the candle stand. It was noticeable that she was 'in an interesting condition,' as people of old-fashioned upbringing used to say. 'This is a handmaid of God!' I thought, 'one of her children is already of an age, and the other is still in the womb - both are sanctified by the prayers and holy impressions of the mother - clever! May the Lord and Mother of God bless her!' At that moment, she approached the icon of the Mother of God, the Quick to Hearken, before which we usually stand in the Vvedensky temple, and knelt down to pray. I accidentally saw her gaze directed at the icon. What a look it was, what faith emanated from that gaze, what love for God, for the divine, for holiness! Oh, if only I could pray like that! 'Mother of God!' my heart prayed for her, 'grant her according to her faith!' As we exited the church through the northern gates, by the icon of the 'Intercessor of Sinners,' we met the stranger again. She was holding prosphora. 'Are you Sergey Alexandrovich Nilus?' she asked me with a shy smile. 'Yes... what can I do for you?' It turned out to be the one who had written to me from Tambov in January (Seraphima Nikolaevna Vishnevskaya). This was Vera with her 5-year-old son Sergey, whom we bid farewell to from Optina today. Let us focus our attention on this Christ-loving couple, return love for their love, and keep their pure image in grateful memory, reflecting the dawn of another otherworldly light."

"Today," Vera told us, "Sergey and I will prepare to partake and receive the sacrament tomorrow, and after the service, allow us to visit you. It is so comforting and joyful to find kindred spirits, one longs to rest from the burdensome worldly impressions: do not deny us your hospitality!" What a joy it was for us to have this new acquaintance! On the same day we met Vera by the icon of the 'Intercessor of Sinners,' my wife and I were passing by the revered graves of the great Optina elders and, as is customary, went to pay our respects. We entered the chapel over the grave of Elder Ambrose and found Vera and her Sergey there: Sergey extended his little hands forward, palms up, and said, 'Father Ambrose, bless me!' At that moment, the mother of the child noticed us... 'Here, my Sergey and I have gotten used to this: after all, Father Ambrose is alive and invisibly present with us here - so it is necessary to seek his blessing, like from a hieromonk!' I could barely hold back the tears... The next day, I visited Father Anatoly while he was administering the sacrament to Vera and her son. Besides them, twelve souls of various ranks and

status were partaking, gathered in Optina from different parts of Russia. It was something to see how seriously and attentively the five-year-old child approached the sacrament of Chrismation! This is how grace-filled mothers start preparing their children's souls for the Kingdom of Heaven! Isn't this how the pious boyars Cyril and Maria raised the soul of the one whom the Lord appointed as the luminary of all Russia, the pillar of Orthodoxy - Venerable Sergius?...

'When I am pregnant,' Vera later said to us on this occasion, 'I often partake of the sacrament and pray to the saint whose name I would like to give to my future child if it is a boy. On the fourth day of Christmas in 1905, my firstborn, Nikolay, born on Easter Saturday in 1900, passed away. When I was carrying him under my heart, I prayed to the wonderful Saint Nicholas, asking him to take my child under his protection. The boy was born and was named after the Saint. This Sergey was born on the first day of Christ's Nativity in 1903. I prayed to Venerable Sergius for him... Many strange things happened with him at his birth, and perhaps even something significant. He was born in the eighth month of pregnancy. Baptism had to be postponed until Epiphany because of his godfather, the churching ceremony fell on the Meeting. Something unusual also happened with his name, something that did not happen with my other children. I prayed to Venerable Sergius for him, and during the prayer, when the priest asked me what name I would like to give the child, my thoughts were divided, and I replied, 'I will say it at the baptism.'"

"This happened because last year there was a glorification of the relics of St. Seraphim, whom I have always believed in deeply. As a young girl, I used to walk on foot to Sarov from my city to visit his grave. And then, I also felt the first movement of the child in me, precisely during the all-night vigil on the 19th of July. All of this puzzled me, and I didn't know what to do: should I name him Sergey, as I had wanted before, or should it be Serafim? I started praying for the Lord to reveal His will to me: and on the night before Epiphany, when the baptism was scheduled, I had a dream that I was traveling to the Trinity-Sergius Lavra with my newborn. From this, I understood that the Lord wanted to give my child the name of Venerable Sergius. This reassured me, especially since Father Venerable Seraphim loved this great Servant of God dearly, and he himself was laid to rest in a coffin..." I listened to these sweet words, flowing like a quiet stream of living water of holy childlike faith, and in my heart echoed the words of the great promise of the Lord to His holy Church: 'And the gates of hell shall not prevail against it!' Truly, they will not prevail, even in a time like ours, when the Church of God can still have such children. And again, Vera's inspired speech continued. 'Did you like my Sergey? What would you say if you saw my late Kolya! He was already an angel on Earth... Once, I put my little Kolya to sleep with the other children. It was around eight in the evening. I heard him calling me from the bedroom. "What's wrong, sweetheart?" I asked. He was sitting in his crib, and he whispered enthusiastically to me, 'My dear mother, look, there are so many Angels flying around here.' 'What are you saying,' I

said, 'Kolya! Where do you see them?' And my heart was pounding. 'Everywhere,' he whispered, 'mom, they are flying all around... They just anointed my head. Feel my head - you see, it's anointed!' I touched his head: the top was wet, but the rest of his head was dry. I thought, is the child delirious? No fever, calm and happy eyes, not feverish: healthy, cheerful, smiling... I checked other children's heads - all dry, sleeping peacefully. And he told me, 'How can you not see the Angels, mother? They are flying all around here... I had the Savior sitting on my bed and talking to me.' I do not know what the Lord spoke to the child about. Either I did not hear anything about this from the servant of God Vera, or I heard but could not retain it in my memory: it was easy to get overwhelmed in this stream of living faith overflowing upon us, with its miracles, seemingly breaking the boundary between earthly and heavenly... 'Kolya even predicted his own death to me,' Vera continued, delighted that she could pour out her heart to people who listened to her with an open soul. 'He died on the fourth day of Christ's Nativity, and he told me about his death in September. Once, my boy came up to me out of the blue and said, "Mommy! I will soon leave you." "Where to," I asked, "my child?" "To God." "How will that happen? Who told you about this?" "I will die, mommy," he said, caressing me, "but please don't cry: I will be with the Angels, and I will be very happy there." My heart sank, but I immediately calmed myself: how could I attach such importance to a child's words?! But no! A little time passed, and my Kolya, in the middle of playing, approached me out of the blue, looked at me, and again spoke about his death, urging me not to cry when he dies... "I will be so happy there, so happy, my dear mother," my child repeatedly reassured me. No matter how much I asked him about where he got these thoughts and who told him about this, he did not give me an answer, skillfully evading these questions..."

"Could it be that this is what the Savior was talking to little Kolya about when heavenly Angels were flying around his crib?... 'This child was so remarkable,' Vera continued, 'judge for yourselves based on this incident. An old carpenter was making a gate in our house and accidentally injured his finger with an ax. The old man rushed to the kitchen, where I was at the time, showing me his finger, blood flowing profusely from it. Kolya was also in the kitchen. He saw the carpenter's bloody finger and, with loud crying, ran to the dining room to the icon of the Holy Trinity. He fell on his knees before the icon and, sobbing, started praying: 'Holy Trinity, heal the carpenter's finger!' We entered the dining room while Kolya, completely absorbed in prayer, continued tearfully to repeat, 'Holy Trinity, heal the carpenter's finger!' I went to get medicine and bandages, and the carpenter stayed in the dining room. When I returned, I saw Kolya already climbing onto the icon lamp to get the oil and, from the icon, he anointed the carpenter's wound with oil, while the old man trustingly held out his injured hand to him and cried with emotion, saying, 'What kind of child is this, what a child!' Thinking he was crying from pain, I said, 'Why are you crying, old man? You didn't cry in the war, but you

cry now!' 'Yours,' he said, 'even a stone would make one cry!' And what do you think? The bleeding stopped immediately, and the wound healed without medicine, from a single bandage. That was my beloved Kolya, my incomparable dear boy... Before Christmas, my stepfather, who was also his godfather, asked me to let Kolya stay in his village. Kolya was his favorite, and this trip turned out to be fatal for the child: he fell ill with scarlet fever and died there. I learned about Kolya's illness from a messenger (there were widespread strikes at that time, and the telegram they sent me was not delivered, so I barely managed to reach my treasure alive just a day before his death. When my husband and I arrived in the village to see my stepfather, we found Kolya still lively. Scarlet fever seemed to have passed, and none of us thought that the child's last hours were upon us. We ordered a service for his recovery. During the service, Kolya prayed earnestly himself and asked to kiss the icons. After the service, he felt so well that the priest refused to give him communion, despite my request, saying that he was healthy and did not need communion. We all cheered up. Some people, after the service and a quick bite, lay down to rest, and even my husband fell asleep. I sat by Kolya's bedside, far from the thought that his final moments were approaching. Suddenly, he said to me, 'Mommy, when I die, you will carry me around the church...'""I said, 'What are you talking about, sweetheart! We are still with you, God willing, we will be alive.' 'And my godfather will soon follow me,' Kolya continued, not listening to my objection. Then, after a moment of silence, he said, 'Mommy, forgive me.' 'Forgive you for what,' I said, 'forgive you, my child?' 'Forgive me for everything, for everything, mommy!' 'May God forgive you, Kolya,' I replied. 'Forgive me: I have been strict with you.' I said this, not realizing that this was my last farewell to a dying CHILD. 'No,' Kolya objected, 'I have nothing to forgive you for. I thank you for everything, my dear mommy!' At that moment, I felt something terrible, and I woke my husband. 'Get up,' I said, 'Kolya seems to be dying!' 'What are you talking about,' my husband replied, 'he is fine - he is sleeping.' Kolya was lying with his eyes closed at that time. Upon hearing my husband's words, he opened his eyes and said with a joyful smile, 'No, I am not sleeping - I am dying. Pray for me!' And he started praying and crossing himself: 'Holy Trinity, save me! St. Nicholas, Venerable Sergius, Venerable Seraphim, pray for me!... Baptize me! Anoint me with oil! Everyone, pray for me!' And with these words, the life of my dear beloved boy ended on earth: his face brightened with a smile, and he passed away.

- And for the first time, my heart was almost murmuring. My grief was so immense that I did not want to entertain the thought, by his bedside or by the coffin, that the Lord had decided to take my treasure away from me. I begged, persistently begged, almost demanded that He, to Whom all things are possible, would revive my child; I could not come to terms with the idea that the Lord might not choose to fulfill my prayer. The day before the burial, seeing that despite my fervent prayers, my child's body remained lifeless, I reached a point of despair. And suddenly, at the foot of the coffin, where I stood in deep contemplation, I felt compelled to pick up the Gospel and read the first thing that came to my eyes. The 16th verse of the 18th chapter of the Gospel of Luke opened up to me, and there I read: 'But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.'

These words were an answer to my sorrow from the Savior Himself, and they instantly pacified my heart: I submitted to the will of God."

"At the burial of Kolya, his words came true: there were large snowdrifts by the church, and in order to carry the small coffin, it had to be carried around the entire church. This was a sign and a joy for me. But when my boy was buried in the frozen ground, and a cold shroud of harsh winter covered his grave, my heart was overwhelmed with great sorrow once more, and again I began to implore the Lord for my son, restless day and night, begging for my solace. As the fortieth day approached, I prepared to partake in the Holy Sacraments and in my madness, I reached the point of demanding a resurrection miracle from God. And on the fortieth day, I dreamt of my Kolya as if he were alive. He came to me looking bright and joyful, illuminated by a certain radiance, and three times he said to me, 'Mommy, you can't! Mommy, you can't! Mommy, you can't!' 'Why can't I?' I exclaimed in despair. 'You must not do this, do not ask for this, mommy!' 'But why not?' 'Oh, mommy!' Kolya replied, 'you yourself wouldn't have thought to ask for this if you had known how good it is for me there, with God. It's better there, incomparably better, my dear mommy!' I woke up, and from that dream, all my grief was lifted as if by a hand.

Three months passed, and the second word of my Kolya came true: following him, his godfather also departed to God in the heavenly abode. The servant of God Vera shared many wonders from her life with me, but not everything can be told, not even in writings: there are still living people who could be affected by my words... No one ever repented in silence, so let's better stay silent this time!... I went to see off Vera and her Sergey through our garden towards the monastery hospital. It was the day they were leaving Optina. As we walked, one of our most respected elders, Father A., who lived in the hospital in retirement, came towards us. We approached him for his blessing, and Sergey extended his little hands... 'Bless us,' he said, 'father!' The elder then bent down and, touching the ground with his old hand, blessed Sergey... 'No,' the elder objected, 'you first bless us!' And to everyone's surprise, the child began to fold his hands into the sign of the cross and blessed the elder with a priestly blessing. 'Something will come out of this child?'"

39. The End

In Moscow, I was not allowed to settle and found a place in the town of Mozhaysk, 100 kilometers away. I had a small room, made flowers, and traveled to Moscow to sell them at the market. I had no other means of livelihood. I visited my sister, who recognized the Sergian Church and therefore was not arrested, and stayed with her in secret for a couple of weeks at a time, paying the janitor to hide my presence. Soon, we learned about the existence of secret Josephite churches, where clandestine worship services were held in hidden rooms, gathering sometimes 20-25 people. The service was conducted in whispers, with strict control over the worshippers due to the possibility of betrayal. They usually arrived at dawn following a predetermined sign. Most times, they cautiously knocked on the downspout at the window, where someone stood listening. An old monk-priest selflessly traveled everywhere he was called and even managed, with God's grace, to give communion to the sick in hospitals. Sitting beside them as a visitor, he heard their confessions, and then, as if offering medicine and drink, he administered communion.

This was how life went on. Moscow was completely foreign to me. My parents brought me there with a one-month-old baby. I was born on my grandmother's estate in the Don region, but I spent my life in Moscow until the age of 25. Like all Muscovites, I loved it, and how good, how unique it was, beautiful with its antiquity: thousands of churches, glistening with golden domes, buildings of various architectural styles, palaces, monuments, chapels with miraculous icons like the Iveron Mother of God and others, monasteries, the Kremlin with its historical cathedrals, full of extraordinary relics. And now? Before you are the unsightly multi-story buildings of Jewish style in the form of straight boxes, with a multitude of narrow windows, no chapels, no churches, except for a few left for show. The domes in the Kremlin do not shine like suns, they stand dark, black. Some say the gilded sheets were removed, while others believe that on the desolate cathedrals, where desolation reigns, the domes themselves turned black. There is no Chudov Monastery, no Ascension Convent in the Kremlin. All monasteries in the city have been torn down, monuments destroyed, no Triumphal Gates, no Red Gates, no Sukharev Tower, which also added to Moscow's beauty. Over the city hovers a fog from the factories, almost all on the streets are Jews, dressed in expensive furs, and communists. If you encounter a disheveled passerby with his head down, you can confidently say that he is from the former noble or merchant class, surviving for some reason. Most terrifying of all is the music of the Internationale on the Spasskaya Tower at the Holy Gates in Moscow, instead of the beautiful prayer 'How glorious is our Lord in Zion.' Above the palace where Stalin lives in the Kremlin, there seems to be a huge infernal fire burning. In the middle of the palace roof is a reservoir not visible from the street: in it lies a giant hidden electric light, which

illuminates a whole forest below with long poles, red bright silk flags, which, swaying in the wind, give the illusion of fire.

Instead of the Cathedral of Christ the Savior, the framework of the construction of the Palace of the Soviets rose up. As the newspapers reported, in response to a foreigner's question: "Are you building a new Tower of Babel?" Stalin replied: "Yes, the only difference is that the Old Testament tower collapsed, but there is no power that can crush mine. I know from the engineers who worked on the construction that the main credit for the building, if the palace is completed, belongs not to Stalin but to America. When Soviet engineers were laying the deep foundation, the subsoil water from the Moscow River washed it away twice. Then American engineers were invited, who laid the foundation on round cushions. Of course, I don't understand any of this, but I heard it from the engineers. The building was supposed to be so tall that Lenin's figure would be above the clouds. As I was leaving Moscow, there was a discussion about the need to change something in the architecture, as the statue might not withstand magnetic storms. A plan born out of satanic pride. Lenin, like all the statues, had an outstretched index finger; in this finger, several rooms were planned, and in the other hand, a lantern illuminating the surroundings for 100 kilometers. All buildings over a long distance were to be demolished, including the old so-called 'Prince's Court,' and the Alexander Shgo Museum, a massive marble building with heavy but beautiful columns, was to be rolled back several meters. In terms of food supplies and other necessary items for the population of Moscow and other cities across Russia, things were as follows: Communists had everything in abundance. Luxurious exhibitions (of course, not like in the blessed times of the tsar) in the stores, so-called 'closed distributors,' only tempted those who were not allowed entry. At one store exit, Jews and party members, both military and civilian, came out carrying bags of the finest snacks and fruits, and in general everything they needed, in leather jackets with self-satisfied faces. At the other exit, there was an endless line of angry people waiting for a portion of bread.

When rumors of a possible war with Germany began, the cautious Soviet authorities started throwing some things out for the common people, and in 1940 and 1941, you could have as many sweets as you wanted for 3 r. 50 kopecks to 60 r. in every store, per kilo or half a kilo. Those that cost 3 r. 50 k. made from soy were very sweet and good. You could buy 100 grams of butter after waiting in line at several stores. Before that, fights and even murders would occur in the lines if someone tried to jump ahead. I know of a case where an imprudent girl shouted: 'Mister, someone is pulling from your pocket.' Within a few steps, a 16-year-old boy cut off her nose with a razor and disappeared. If you are afraid of something and see a royal soldier, you feel supported and protected, but in the Soviets, if you are alone on the street and see a Red Army soldier approaching, believers quickly pray, while unbelievers try to hide out of fear. Let anyone deny it, but this is the real truth. So, I lived quietly in Mozhaysk, seeing almost no one and traveling to Moscow. In 1940, I

attended a secret service at Easter matins. Returning to my sister after the liturgy, I found a summons: 'Mandatory presence at the Mozhaysk Financial Department on Sunday before noon, for reporting on flower production and paying taxes.' I had to return to Mozhaysk on the first train. I showed the summons. 'You can go; your case won't be dealt with today.' It was simply a desire to spoil my holiday. Returning to Moscow the same day, I fell into deep sorrow, and I remembered my cozy living room in Yaroslavl and Mussorgsky's music 'Night on Bald Mountain.' I often played this beautiful piece with my husband or eldest son in a duet. Those who know this music probably remember how the dark forces raged under the night sky near Kiev, a reality felt in the sounds, where under the hissing and roaring of frenzy, flying witches collided with each other's black horns, and tails twisted in a dance. But right at the peak of the dark power's victory over Kiev (as dawn appeared as a rosy streak in the east), a powerful toll of church bells rang out at dawn. The witches scattered, the uncanny and terrifying sounds subsided. In the divine silence of the emerging morning, the bells rang out rhythmically, stroke after stroke, not only in one but in many churches and holy monasteries. Mussorgsky wonderfully conveyed the entire picture of prayer's victory over hell. The flute of the shepherd, the bleating of sheep, the birds singing, all eagerly greeting the sun, everything was genuinely wonderful in the sounds. A comparison sparked in my mind, was it not a prophecy in Mussorgsky's musical genius? Perhaps, when dawn breaks over Moscow, there will be a powerful tolling of the Great Bell of Ivan (it is said that its size and weight prevented it from being removed). The scared power of his sounds, making the earth tremble, will force all the unclean antichrist's forces to disperse and hide in the netherworld from fear before the Almighty God's Terrible Power, which will say in the sound of the bell "enough." The clock on the Spasskaya Tower will play "How Glorious," and instead of hellish fire, the tricolor Russian flag will flutter above the palace. I got carried away in these fantasies for a moment. The terrible reality of the GPU power awakened my consciousness. No one knows the day or hour; it is not yet time! And one must endure.

So, three years passed. Persecution of believers not only did not subside but, on the contrary, took on an increasingly brutal nature due to rumors of war. Wherever people gathered, the only topic of conversation was about new tortures. The son of a woman in Mozhaysk, imprisoned for some crime he was absolutely innocent of, had his hair pulled out slowly over several months to force a confession. His hair was very thick and curly. When he returned home, he was completely bald. They released him because the real criminal was found. Brutal and inhuman methods were used during interrogations by the GPU. They brought in small or even older children, and if someone could not confess while being innocent of the accusation, they would start tormenting the children in front of their mothers or fathers. There is no need to speak about the dramas that unfolded here; it is self-explanatory. Parents took on any accusations. Hidden hatred towards Stalin and the communists was, of course, present among a significant majority of the population, but fear, an

indescribable fear, even led seemingly strong-minded people to cowardice. Many renounced even their belief in God during interrogations. I have heard many times how the unfortunate justified themselves by saying that they only renounced it in words and on paper, but in their hearts, they believed. The Savior said: "Whoever denies Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father." For someone who has experienced and witnessed the horrific horrors in Soviet Russia, it is impossible to condemn such people. Not everyone has the strength to endure martyrdom, and, of course, at that moment, one repents and relies on God's Mercy for forgiveness, but to save themselves from persecution, they attend false services in churches whose clergy themselves do not believe in the existing grace there; otherwise, the most terrible sacrilege of the Sacrament of Communion could not have been allowed. Priests are tasked with always having two masks: one for the healthy and the other for the sick to avoid infection. Nothing special happened to me over these years that I could write about, except for a scene of free elections. For a month, posters were put up on all houses, streets, stores, poles, kiosks, etc., with large letters that read: "Vote for Stalin." The grief of losing my children was too great, and death itself was not as terrifying as when they were with me. I decided not to go. The owners of my room pleaded for me to go because they would be arrested for renting a room to a counter-revolutionary and not reporting it.

I had not yet risen when the landlady opened the door. Without further words, two Komsomol members and a Komsomol girl entered. They instructed me to get dressed and then led me outside, where a sleigh was waiting. They sat me down and brought me to the polling station. Behind a large table adorned with laurel trees and with busts of Lenin and Stalin in the middle, several Communists were seated with lists in alphabetical order, and there were several ballot boxes. They marked me off on the list and handed me an envelope with enclosed paper, saying, "Seal it and drop it into the designated ballot box." The envelopes were distributed in a sequential order. If anyone was curious about the contents of the paper, they could enter a booth, where a silhouette of a hidden agent could be seen behind a thin curtain. This is the true truth!

People who did not show up or wrote a different name were sometimes arrested immediately, or within a short period.

Finishing my memoirs, I can provide some additional interesting information about Stalin's personality and disturbing facts. Real estate, magnificent buildings in all cities of Russia, were taken from the owners and gifted to the Communists for their services to the authorities. Here is one fact and its aftermath. In Moscow, on Vozdvizhenka Street, there was the house of the wealthy merchants Morozov. It was a luxurious palace. Gorky received it as a reward for his services. The Morozov sign was removed from the gate and replaced with Gorky's. All newspapers, starting with "Pravda," announced this gift from Stalin.

At the second stop from Moscow on the Smolensk railway, station "Kuntsevo," a few versts away, colossal palaces of high value were being erected, summer entertainment residences for Stalin, Voroshilov, Budenny, and others, at the behest and desire of the servants of the antichrist. An avenue led to these palaces, where no one was allowed to enter. Throughout its length (25 versts), the GPU police were stationed. Orgies and balls were held, where, in times of severe food shortages, Soviet women, adorned with diamonds and precious stones, indulged in Champagne, expensive wines, exquisite dishes, dinners, and fruits.

When Stalin left the Kremlin around 6-7 o'clock, the traffic would stop along his route. Masses of police officers would force everyone to turn onto other streets. Stalin would speed like lightning down the empty Arbat Street and beyond. An automobile would drive in front, with someone disguised as Stalin to avoid an assassination attempt, while Stalin himself, either in a red wig or with a large white beard and mustache, would ride in a second car.

Everyone knew about this but feared discussing it in whispers. Judgment will come for him, like for King Antiochus in the Book of Maccabees in the Bible. Many of us who arrived in recent years are surprised that almost no one abroad knows the truth about Lenin's death and the subsequent events with his body. He decomposed during his lifetime. It was something terrible, a clear divine punishment. When, after great difficulty, they embalmed him and placed him in the mausoleum on Red Square, he sank into the ground with the coffin and disappeared. The mausoleum was built over the Kremlin's sewage system, where he sank into filth and was found many sagens away. Now there is a wax figure; everyone who wants to visit the mausoleum, whether followers or the curious, must keep moving swiftly and not dare to stop. The engineers who built the mausoleum were tried (unofficially), and all of them were shot, accused of deliberate crime. This is a historical fact.

In late 1940 and early 1941, persistent rumors of war with Germany began to circulate. Since the entry of German troops into Moscow was prohibited, except for party members and the GPU. I tried to request permission to visit my sister, but it was denied. I stayed in Mozhaysk. Describing the military events is not my goal; I will only speak the truth about how, by Stalin's order, as the city approached the enemy's advance, Komsomol members set fire to it in a frenzy of panic, carrying kerosene cans. There were no Germans yet when flames raged from all sides. Two days before the Germans arrived in Borodino, the historical Mozhaysk Cathedral

was burned or, rather, completely disfigured, as not all of it collapsed. When the Germans occupied Borodino, orders were given to retreat. I stood on the porch in contemplation. In the city, many arrests were made, and those suspected of sympathizing with the Germans were immediately taken to the outskirts and shot.

The Red Army was retreating in panic. A stranger, who briefly stopped by me as he ran past, said, "Mrs. Urusova, if you have the opportunity, hide immediately. You are on the list to be arrested, and they will take you now." A neighbor standing with me said, "Do you know who that is? That's the GPU; I know him personally."

I grabbed my purse and quickly walked through gardens and fields out of town to a village on the outskirts, where I was sheltered by a peasant family I knew. We spent a day in a dugout covered with boards and grass. The battle was brief. Within 24 hours, the Germans occupied Moshaysk.

The heavy burden that had weighed on my consciousness, knowing that Russia was falling under the rule of a foreign power, seemed to lift from my shoulders that morning; a sigh of relief of liberation from the hellish life erupted from me and from all who loved our dear homeland, Russia.

At that time, people did not believe in Stalin's victory. The Germans were nearing Moscow. Within three days, they would take the city and liberate the tormented, those who were still alive, from the labor camps in the north and Siberia, and from the dreadful Lubyanka prison. The Germans were greeted with people falling to their knees, raising their hands to the sky, thanking God. People wept and congratulated each other. It was an indescribable surge of joy.

As the Germans retreated, they took refugees with them, and I was among them, leaving behind everything dear on the earth. Upon arriving in Germany, I began to arrange permission to travel to France to see my only remaining son, the eldest, Sergei, but I did not receive approval. I went to Moravia, and from there to Prague. Before the Bolsheviks arrived, I left for Kempten, hoping to reach the Americans soon, which was fulfilled just a few days later.

While in Prague, I learned about another torture method that I had not heard of in the USSR. There was a woman there, no longer young, from Siberia, the daughter of wealthy fishery owners. She managed to escape from a Siberian camp, hid in forests, and made her way south at night.

Under Stalingrad, she ended up with the Germans and came to Europe with them. On her back, between her shoulder blades, was a deep scar, an imprint of a three-inch five-pointed seared star, and on her head was a shapeless, also deep scar, which sometimes caused her to lose the ability to speak. In that camp, everyone was

branded with a scorching iron. This Elizabeth was well-known to all the parishioners of the St. Nicholas Church, and Bishop Sergei [of Prague] knew her; he knew her and her scars.

Now it is 1947, ten years since I parted ways with my two youngest sons. If my two younger daughters are alive, they are somewhere in Russia. Their husbands are in exile. My eldest son is dying in a hospital in Paris. That is the brief history of my life from 1917 to 1947.

The goal of my memoirs was not to share my sorrows, sent to me as a test by the Lord God. As I wrote, I witnessed many joys in the mutual love between my children and me, and many wonderful mercies of God. I wanted to reveal the truth about the Bolsheviks in a chronological description of my experiences over 30 years to those who do not know it or are blinded by the propaganda lies about it. In December 1946, I learned that as the Germans retreated from Stalingrad, a train carrying several thousand refugees accompanied them. The train was blown up on a bridge over the Voronezh River by Bolsheviks and collapsed into the water. Everyone perished, and there, as I was told, was supposed to be my daughter with my 12-year-old grandson. In August 1947, my eldest son, Sergei, passed away in Paris. Despite all my requests to allow me to bid him farewell and see him after 29 years of separation, the French consulate refused.

Natalia Vladimirovna Urusova

N. V., Holy-Seraphimovsky



Princess of Natalya Vladimirovna Urusov (1874–1963)

From the day of the revolution until the beginning of the Great Patriotic War, Princess Natalia Urusova experienced incredible trials: she lost her house, all her property, two sons died in 1937 for being religious people of the noble family, had malaria in severe form, wandered around other corners, saved children from starvation, earning as much as she could, her daughter died of the disease, the second died in the war, the other children also did not survive ... In 1941, she emigrated abroad, telling her relatives through a neighbor that she died ... so that her relatives did not suffer because of her deed. She wandered around Europe for a long time, then moved to America, where she took monasticism and died at the age of 89.